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ORGANISED LABOUR IN A MARKET ECONOMY :

A study of redundancy and Workplace
Relations as an issue of power-conflict
in the British Motor Industry.

JOHN SALMON

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ABSTRACT

It is widely appreciated that redundancy and the question of job security remain among the most central issues confronting contemporary industrial societies. In particular, redundancy is possibly the most important single issue that an individual worker is likely to face, and more especially manual workers, in the course of their working life. Therefore, the control over redundancy decisions is of considerable importance to individuals and their organisations, which seek to defend their position in industry. Though redundancy, and redundancy provision as part of manpower policies has been widely viewed as being a cornerstone of public policy, the orientation of redundancy research has largely focused upon its implications for the workings of the labour market. Even though public policy has defined worker resistance, arising out of fears of job insecurity, as being a central source for opposition to managerial change, redundancy research in the UK has shown little interest in the impact of redundancy upon workplace relations, and more particularly, workplace organisation. The object of this study is to attempt to draw attention to the impact which redundancy, (and recessions) have had upon the exercise of power in the workplace.

The study is based upon the historical experiences of redundancy in the British motor industry. The approach has been to present redundancy as a 'key issue' in the determination of power in workplace organisation. The research is introduced by an account of the contemporary evidence of the affect of redundancy, job loss and unemployment, upon the status of the manual worker in modern society. It is maintained that this condition is underpinned by decisions over the exercise of power. In the first part of the study, the review of redundancy literature reveals a general failure to consider redundancy either in terms of workplace relations or as a question of power. The remainder of the research, therefore, undertakes an examination of redundancy as a central issue in power relations. The approach adopted has been to maintain that while power remains a central concept in workplace relations, an approach which seeks to analyse the concept of power needs to explore the interactions of the principal parties engaged in power struggles, though the selection of a key issue over which there exists a clear division of interest. It is in this respect that the study explores the ways in which the handling of redundancy has been of major importance in the strategies adopted by management, to the changing power of workplace organisation. It is concluded that the transformation of the redundancy question in the British motor industry is indicative of the changing allegiances towards workplace leaderships within the increasingly elaborate framework of industrial relations practices.

PREFACE

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To John E Salmon

GMWU Senior Shop Steward

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AEU	Amalgamated Engineering Union
ASE	Amalgamated Society of Engineers
AWA	Armstrong Whitworth Aircraft
BC	Branch Committee
BEC	British Employers Confederation
BL	British Leyland
BLSP	British Light Steel Pressings
BMC	British Motor Corporation
BSMW	Birmingham and Midland Sheet Metal Workers Union
BW EEA	Birmingham and Wolverhampton Engineering Employers Association
CEJC	
COV EEA	Coventry Engineering Employers Association
CP	Communist Party of Great Britain
CSEU	Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions
CTR	Consolidated Time Rate
DC	District Committee
DE	Department of Employment
DO	District Organiser
DS	District Secretary
EC	Executive Council/Committee
EEF	Engineering Employers Federation
ETU	Electrical Trades Union
EWO	Essential Works Order
JPC	Joint Production Committee
JSSC	Joint Shop Stewards Committee
MOL	Ministry of Labour
MOS	Ministry of Supply

MSSC	Motor Shop Stewards Committee
NC	National Committee
NE	National Executive Committee
NEDC	National Economic Development Council
NJAC	National Joint Advisory Council
NSMW	National Sheet Metal Workers Union
NSO	National Service Officer
NSSNC	National Shop Stewards National Council
NUVB	National Union of Vehicle Builders
SMMT	Society of Motor Manufacturers and Trading
TGWU	Transport and General Workers Union
TUC	Trades Union Congress
UPA	United Patternmakers Association.

INTRODUCTION

JOB SECURITY AND WAGE LABOUR

INTRODUCTION

Abstract

The position of wage-labour in the market economies of advanced capitalist societies appears characterised by an apparent ambivalence in worker attitudes arising out of the conditions under which labour power is exchanged. On the one hand, especially in regard to manual work-forces, deprivation in work is often accompanied by strong attachments to jobs. However, with the increasingly fragile status of job-security, attention has re-focused upon the issue of redundancy, unemployment, and the 'right to work'. The process of job-loss, in a market economy, engenders considerable social divisions in the position of collective wage-labour. The powerful forces of market rationality, public policy, and managerial decision-making, appear as divisive determinations in both job-loss, and in the experience of being unemployed, in the market for labour. While the distribution of power and inequality may give rise to forms of collectivism in the workplace, on the question of redundancy it poses particular difficulties for the collective opposition of wage-labour.

This introductory chapter will seek to locate the ambiguous status of wage-labour in the structure of a market economy. Drawing particularly upon recent evidence of redundancy and unemployment in Britain, it will seek to identify the divisive nature of the labour market.

The chapter concludes by maintaining that though the industrial worker remains largely powerless in relation to the causes of redundancy, and possesses little control over the actual redundancy

decision itself, despite the experience of job deprivation, manual workforces are far from disinterested in issues of job security. Although the market ideologies of self help and individualism influence much of public social policy in Britain, in the work situation, public policy over redundancy has had to confront worker interests in the preservation of his job. Regardless of the low level of moral attachment to work, wage labour retains a high level of job dependence. It is the ambiguous position of wage labour in a market economy that forms the basis of worker interest in jobs, and which makes redundancy and the fear of unemployment, issues of job control.

I REDUNDANCY, UNEMPLOYMENT, AND THE LABOUR MARKET

In their conclusion of three studies of redundancy published in 1959 for the Acton Society Trust, the authors remarked,

"In general, redundancy emerges as a serious matter, not to be dismissed, even in conditions of general high employment ruling at the time of these inquiries, as a trivial incident about which no sensible worker should worry". ¹

Though much has happened in the state of the labour market since the end of the 1950's, redundancy, and the related question of unemployment, have, if anything, acquired a far greater significance as issues in the histories of modern industrial societies. In the period since the mid-1970's, the spectre of unemployment has emerged as a central question, not just for manpower policy, but for the wider issue which the 'right to work' poses for wage-labour in the market economies of advanced capitalism. At the first meeting of the Manpower and Social Affairs Committee of the O E C D, matters conducted at ministerial level, in March 1976, the Committee Chairman identified the dilemmas raised by the operation of the labour market.

"To conclude, and to sum up in one word, we must adjust the economic dynamic, without discouraging it, to the social demand, thus responding to the crucial question of our time: are our free societies still able to guarantee everyone the most important element of liberty and dignity for each individual, the chance to work?" ²

In Britain the question of redundancy has been a cornerstone of manpower policy, and, since the early 1960's it has been an integral part of public policy.³ The effects of redundancy and unemployment however, can hardly be claimed to have been ameliorated by the experience of time. Comparing methods for handling redundancies in Britain, France, and Germany, Mukerjee writes,

"Redundancy is a man-made phenomenon. It is not some spontaneous act of nature with a trail of disaster marking its passage. Yet in Britain, at least, that is how redundancies seem to appear to those who are affected as to the spectator" ⁴

Since Mukerjee's remark, the the incidence of redundancy as a cause of unemployment, has increased dramatically. The General Household Survey for 1978 reveals that 48 per cent of workers who had lost their jobs had done so because of a redundancy.⁵ During 1980, the number of workers receiving a statutory redundancy payment rose to a record 490,000⁶, an increase of 178 per cent above the level recorded at the time of Mukerjee's comment, and 45 per cent above the previous peak for statutory redundancies established in 1975. Even this figure, represents a serious under-estimate of the absolute level of redundancy. Workers with less than two years service with an employer, and those under the age of 20; or above retiring age, or part-time employees engaged for less than 16 hours per week, are not eligible for payment under the statutory provisions. As a result large numbers of 'redundant' workers do not appear in the official figures. The Institute of Manpower Studies, for example, estimate that during the early part of 1981 actual redundancies were occurring in Britain at a projected annual rate of over 1.4 million.⁷

Redundancies, however, are only one method for calculating job-loss. Firms may reduce the number of jobs by lowering the retirement age, ceasing to fill vacancies, or halting recruitment.⁸ Policies which, without resulting in the actual redundancies of employees, may directly affect levels of unemployment and the stock of jobs available in the labour market. Average unemployment has progressively increased during the post war period. In the first 20 post war years average annual unemployment stood at 1.8 per cent. By 1972 it had risen to 3 per cent, while male unemployment in 1980 had reached 7 per cent.⁹ Similarly, the figures for registered unemployment has shown a dramatic increase. Between 1966 and 1975

there was a four fold increase in unemployment, as the registered unemployed exceeded one million.¹⁰ In 1978 it reached 1.5 million, and by January 1982, it exceeded 3 million.¹¹

This pattern of growth in redundancies and unemployment has intensified competition in the labour market. In 1963 there were four unemployed workers for every notified vacancy. By 1972, this had reached a ratio of 7:1; 1977, 8.5:1; and 1982, 15.5:1.

This deterioration in the net market position for labour has been very unequally distributed. It has been estimated by Metcalf that only 3 per cent of the labour force bears 70 per cent of the annual weeks of unemployment.¹² But it is across the social class structure that the inequality of unemployment has its severest impact. Sinfield sums up the evidence for male workers,

"Men in unskilled and semi-skilled manual work were twice as likely as skilled to have had some time unemployed; men in manual work as a whole were twice as vulnerable as the non-manual; and among those in the intermediate and junior, or routine non-manual, had twice as great a risk as professionals, employers and managers".¹³

The unskilled in particular experience the highest levels of unemployment. They comprise only 9 per cent of the male labour force with no period of unemployment during 1978, but 17 per cent of those with one to nine weeks of unemployment, and, 39 per cent of those with 10 or more weeks of unemployment.¹⁴ Only 4 per cent of employers or managers are likely to experience unemployment, compared to 18 per cent for the unskilled, who are three times as prone to periods of unemployment during a year than are semi-skilled workers.¹⁵ Even during periods of relatively low unemployment, manual workers are not likely to be immune from the insecurities associated with the exchange of their labour-power in a market economy. Between 1953 and 1963, 31.5 per cent of male skilled

workers, 39.4 per cent of semi-skilled, and 57.7 per cent of unskilled male manual workers, endured periods of unemployment.¹⁶

Although the experience of unemployment is a burden most directly related to manual workers, divisions based upon sex and age also fragment the impact of unemployment among labour forces. During the 1950's, despite the relatively lower proportion of women in employment and the generally low levels of unemployment, the incidence of female unemployment remained higher than that for most male workers, with the exception of the unskilled.¹⁷ In the period since, the growth in the female workforce has to some extent been shielded from some of the full effects of recessions. During the 1970's, the severe decline in manufacturing and construction, as opposed to the expansion in the service sector, favoured the protection of large areas of female employment.¹⁸ Nevertheless, during the economic recession of 1974-75, unemployment among women in the UK began to rise more sharply than that of men.¹⁹

Unemployment is also likely to divide work forces by age. Between 1971 and 1976 the unemployment rate among youths more than doubled. In January 1980 almost half of all males who had been out of work for a week or less were aged under 25, compared to only 14 per cent for those over 50 years. However, whereas 42 per cent of those aged 50 and over had been out of work for 6 months or more, this compared to less than 18 per cent of those under 25 years of age.²⁰

Although the classical theory of labour market behaviour sees the unfettered operation of markets producing movements towards equilibrium, in which both the price and sale of labour power will be maximised to a point of full utilisation, the practice of market economies reveals that far from a sustained position of equilibrium being maintained, wage-labour remains constantly vulnerable to positions of dis-equilibrium.²¹ In employment, workforces appear frequently vulnerable to the managerial power of labour discharge and redundancy. The effects of market distributions produces wide variations, and sharp differences within wage-labour, in terms of proneness to unemployment. The labour market in Britain, however, is not just characterised by the current rapid increases in unemployment, or the record levels of statutory redundancy payments to wage labour. The structured inequality of social class exists not just among the labour market for the unemployed, but it enters into the levels of worker security in jobs. The competitive forces of the labour market and the power of management practices impose a particularly divisive categorisation upon the process of job-loss. This is especially apparent in the case of a redundancy.

In a redundancy the subjection of wage-labour to the rationale of the market and the power of management control is almost entirely involuntary. While it is possible for workforces to submit themselves for 'voluntary' redundancy, the fact that a management decision had already been arrived at for the actual number of workers to be dispossessed, renders the redundancy decision, as opposed to the selection process, an involuntary action. In this sense redundancy would come under Keynes' concept of "involuntary-unemployment",²² in which dispossession occurs through no fault of the worker. In practice

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public attitudes towards job-loss, and unemployment.³²

The power over redundancy decisions, and the treatment experienced by the redundant, however, both reveal considerable social and economic divisions which differentiate within the collective position of wage-labour. The unequal experience of job-loss and insecurity in jobs, displays wide variations in regard to age, sex, occupation, skill, industry, and employer policies and practices. While these divisions are in themselves also manifestations of the unequal distributions of life-chances and class position, it is in the labour market itself that the dispossessed worker faces the severest forms of unequal treatment. In Britain the evidence available suggests that market decline rather than industrial modernisation has been the principal force generating redundancy and worker insecurity.

Although public manpower policy in Britain originated with a desire to promote industrial modernisation to increase the international competitiveness of domestic industry, the major causes of redundancy have appeared as the results of industrial failure and market decline. In the Parker, et al, Government survey, only 8 per cent of redundancies where workers received compensation, and, in only 2 per cent of uncompensated redundancies, was the job-loss due to the reorganisation of work.³³ Redundancies owing to automation accounted for only 3 per cent of paid redundants and 1 per cent of uncompensated redundants. Whereas 71 per cent of all paid redundants were due to firms closing, falls in the product market and the closure of uneconomic parts of firms, the remaining 13 per cent were due to amalgamations, or financial difficulties.³⁴ Daniel and Stilgoe, in their study of redundancies in 300 establishments

carried out in 1978, reported that 60 per cent of all redundancies had been due to deficient demand in the product market.³⁵

The general vulnerability of wage-labour to the workings of market competition in terms of redundancy, has, like unemployment itself, been greatest among older workers, the less skilled, and the young and the low paid. Daniel found that among the redundant-unemployed, 40 per cent had been employed in particularly insecure jobs - seasonal, contract, or short, fixed-term employment: Jobs, in the main, most likely to be offered to younger workers. Only 1 per cent of workers under 25 were made redundant owing to factory closures, shortages of work and reorganisations.³⁶ But among those aged 55 and over, 26 per cent of the redundant-unemployed were dismissed for these causes.³⁷

The general incidence of redundancy has increasingly been placed upon sections of the labour force least able to adapt to the demands of the labour market. In a recent survey, 3 out of 5 workers made redundant, were in manual jobs, mostly unskilled, and earning below the national average wage.³⁸ Age has increasingly become an important factor in employers' redundancy decisions. Before 1965 only 19 per cent of employers reported to the Government Social Survey that age was being a factor in their decision of making workers redundant, but by 1969 this had become a factor mentioned by 38 per cent of employers.³⁹ By 1974 a study conducted by the BIM concluded that age had become the most single important determinant of the employers' redundancy selection decision.⁴⁰ About 70 per cent of company provisions which exceed statutory requirements for compensation are for older workers.⁴¹ It is among the larger firms that age discrimination in redundancy policies is most apparent, whereas

among small employers, an employee's work record is more likely to be the main basis for redundancy selection.

The workers' dependence upon employment is constantly undermined by the threats of job insecurities. The experience differs according to industry. In mining and quarrying, for example, employer redundancy policies in their programmes for colliery closures are weighted towards encouraging older workers to leave the industry,⁴² while younger workers tend to be offered alternative work at other collieries. In instrument engineering, where a high premium is placed upon worker skill, experience and physical standards of manual dexterity and good eyesight, redundancy remains lightest between the 35-44 age group, but rises sharply among those over 55 years, where these abilities may be in decline.⁴³ It is among manual workers that older aged groups appear most dispensable to employers. In mining, 83 per cent of all redundancies were among those aged 55 and above,⁴⁴ a quarter of the redundancies in the motor industry during 1976, and a fifth of all redundancies in transport and communications, which includes the docks, took place among those aged 60 and above.⁴⁵

By contrast, among the predominantly white collar employees, in banking, insurance and finance, almost a quarter of redundancies occurred amongst workers in their 20's compared to only 8 per cent for those above the age of 60 years, while in the professional and scientific services sector of employment, nearly a third of all redundancies were amongst those under the age of 30. Experience and qualification among those white collar⁴⁶ occupations has tended to favour the retention of older workers. In manual employment the value of long service in redundancy situations is invariably

associated with an insistence from well organised trade unions. In industries like shipbuilding the widespread application of 'Last in - first out' has preserved the position of the older worker, but the decline in jobs in the industry has been placed upon the 20-24 age group.⁴⁷

Although clearly marked divisions can be identified which reveal the propensity for particular sections of the labour force to be more prone to the effects of unemployment and redundancy, employer practices, operating within specific industries, and framed within the overall context of public policy provision, have combined to locate the unequal burden of redundancy. This inequality and social division has been, perhaps, most apparent in the process of job-loss itself. In the main, the practices of employers, through the provision of compensation, and through the control of the redundancy process, has begun to establish a structure of differential entitlement. The social divisions arising among workforces in the labour market have entered into policies for the handling of redundant workers. The principal mechanism for social division in the workplace has been the application of financial arrangements to encourage job-loss. Statutory compensation has itself been supplemented and reinforced by additional ex-gratia payments and other employer supported policy inducements.

The calculation of statutory compensation based upon length of service and earnings, while reinforcing differences between the position of male and female, also opens up an age differential. Despite their significance in employment, women workers, because of their predominance in part-time, or generally shorter periods of employment with a single employer, are more likely to be prone to

redundancies, but less likely to be eligible for compensation, or, be in receipt of much lower levels of compensation, either because of their shorter duration of employment or owing to low wage levels.⁴⁸ Daniel found that less than a quarter of the workers paid compensation for redundancy were women.⁴⁹ In regard to age the social divisions are even more apparent. A study of a 10 per cent sample of the redundant in 1976 concluded.

"The fact that the older redundant workers tend to have had longer service and been more highly paid (and therefore been in receipt of the largest redundancy payments) is consistent with redundancy acting as a social mechanism to remove from the labour force older persons nearing retirement, after long service, by means of comparatively generous compensation".⁵⁰

"Comparatively generous compensation", is however, confined to very few of those made redundant. Daniel revealed

"Our findings showed that the role of redundancy payments in relation to the unemployed can be greatly exaggerated. Only 7 per cent of our respondents had received payments under the Redundancy Payments Act on leaving their last job, and these tended to be among the higher occupational levels. Thus while having received substantial lump sums did reduce concern about being out of work and did reduce the sense of urgency in seeking a new job, particularly among the older workers, only a small proportion had received substantial sums under the Redundancy Payments Act".⁵¹

This picture has since been confirmed by the Manpower Services Study of 2,000 establishments which had made claims for rebate in January 1981. Although the bases of the sample would tend to understate the number of workers without entitlements to compensation it discovered that a third of all workers got no compensation; that among those eligible, the average statutory payment was £1,050, but half the sample received under £500. Only 4 per cent of those redundant received more than £5,000.⁵² While some 40 per cent of employers made some kind of extra-statutory payment, for example,

ex gratia payments, closure bonuses, payment in lieu of notice, and payments in kind, the distribution of these payments tended to widen the social division within the workforces, already imposed by statutory schemes.

"Clearly the determinants of the statutory scheme - especially service - also tend to be those of the extra-statutory lump sum payments. That explains the progressive differences in redundancy payments made, both between ineligible and eligibles; and between eligibles without, and with, access to extra-statutory schemes..... these provisions can significantly supplement the lump sum payments, while further widening the gulf between the haves and have nots". 53

The labour market in Britain operates not merely as a device for the 'rational' distribution of the supply of labour to the needs of employers. Labour markets, in themselves, sustain, and reinforce, and even introduce, wide social, as well as economic divisions, in the condition of the collective worker. Redundancy, unemployment, and the process of job-loss, impose particularly severe inequalities in the experiences of manual labour forces. This sectionalising of wage-labour, by skill, age, and sex, combined with the overall state of the market, considerably affects an individuals 'life-chances' for maintaining a level of economic security. For the majority of manual workers the power of employer decisions and the permanent subjection to the 'impersonal' economic 'laws', appear as formidable obstacles to worker security and dependence in market economies. It is the insecurity of wage-labour, with its universal dependence upon the employment relationship which forms the basis for a worker interest in job security.

The now considerable evidence available from studies conducted by industrial sociologists and industrial psychologists presents a broad consensus of the view that for manual workers in particular, industrial life imposes substantial levels of deprivation upon the condition of wage-labour. Among large sections of the labour force, it is suggested that work itself provides little in the form of 'intrinsic satisfaction' for the industrial worker.⁵⁴ Life on the shop floor is characterised by the varying degrees of 'powerlessness';⁵⁵ a lack of 'worker autonomy'. Work itself is viewed as no longer forming a 'central life interest'⁵⁶; wage-labour has become increasingly orientated towards 'extrinsic interests', becoming 'calculatingly involved', in which the 'cash-nexus' and the 'instrumental-worker' attitudes have accompanied the growth of mass assembly industries,⁵⁷ worker 'de-skilling', and the steady decline of the traditional class-community based industries, such as coalmining, fishing, steel-making, the docks, etc.⁵⁸ Although there have been a number of important challenges, either to the conclusions being drawn from such studies, or to the assumptions⁵⁹ which appear to underlie some of the research findings and methods employed, a factor which generally remains constant throughout such studies, has been that workers possess an interest in the security of their employment. Deprivation in work, in other words, does not appear to substantially diminish worker attachment or dependence upon work. In a number of notable instances it appears to actually strengthen it.

Insecurity for wage-labour is not confined to experiences in the labour market. The insecurity of labour is a feature of work itself.

Wedderburn asks,

"Is security a more important consideration than whether or not people find their work interesting? Almost certainly it is, although little attention is paid to the implications of such a preference". ⁶⁰

She goes on to elaborate,

"Not having a job is the basic insecurity, but if we also take into account the reduction of overtime working and the increases in short-time working we are bound to accept that there is widespread anxiety, particularly for manual workers. It is a remarkable fact that the great majority of manual workers cannot rely upon knowing what will be in their wage packet from week to week". ⁶¹

It is, consequently, not surprising that much of the available evidence of worker attitudes reveals their high priority towards their interests in job security. Security of income and security of employment, to some extent are interdependent states, are highly valued expectations from a work situation. The "predominantly instrumental way" in which the Affluent Worker Studies caricatured worker attachment, disclosed that while only 29 per cent of craftsmen and setters, and only 14 per cent of process workers, machinists and assemblers, were attached to their present employment for reasons associated to the nature of their work, ⁶² 87 per cent of the former group and 82 per cent of the latter explained their attachment to economic considerations - "level of pay, degree of security, or the extent of fringe benefits". Next to pay, "good security" remained the strongest reason for job attachment and substantially above reasons related to the "fairness of the employer". ⁶³ In an account of white collar workers behaviour, Crozier argued that the workers involvement in the promotion system was essentially an expression of worker interest in security. A congruence emerged among those who most closely identified with formation between the values held by the worker and the values which

stemmed from the organisation.⁶⁴

Theorists of dual labour markets have maintained that prolonged worker attachment to an employer may produce a mutual state of joint worker and employer dependence⁶⁵, an outcome of which may be the increased protection of the worker against the general insecurities of employment.⁶⁶ Increased dependence, however, where it is based upon worker 'de-skilling' or the engagement upon routine tasks, can itself be a source of worker insecurity. Wyatt and Marriott write of the attitudes of mass production workers,

"The desire for security was intensified by a belief that the market value of the men employed on mass production methods was very limited".⁶⁷

Redundancy, or ill health, can still pose a threat to workers who have possession of an hitherto long term secure job. Once such a job is lost, not only are the workers involved separated from the relative protections of the internal labour market, but they fall back into the weaknesses of their "key individual characteristics" for their future employment prospects.⁶⁸ If, for example, they are in ill-health, possess a disability, or are from an older age group, or are not suitable for retraining, they are likely to enter what Norris defines as the "subemployed" - a strata of the labour force most prone to recurrent unemployment.⁶⁹

Worker insecurity, however, can still be a feature of the work situation even where the threat of redundancy has been removed. Research among the high technology industries, in addition to emphasising more job involvement has also stressed the attractions for greater job security. The absence of compulsory redundancy, however, has not in itself removed the quest for job security from within the work situation. Gallie reveals that worker interests

in security became developed at different levels. He writes,

"People were now primarily concerned about security in their particular job within the organisation, about the security of their hierarchical rank, and about security in the way of work to which they had become accustomed".⁷⁰

'No redundancy' and a reliance upon 'natural wastage' affected manning levels, increased the intensity of work, threatened 'predictable' work patterns; increased job mobility, changed the composition of established workgroups, and social networks, and extended the content of job tasks, while de-manning produced a social isolation among workers.⁷¹ In the study of alienation and technology undertaken by Blauner, insecurity of employment in the mass production industry appeared as an aspect of worker powerlessness, and lack of intergration in the work situation. Although at an institutional level, a degree of formal inte'gration existed between management and trade union organisations, in his example of the car industry, little sense of worker loyalty to either occupation, or the company, existed on the shop floor. The severe states of job deprivation and job insecurity intensified the workers' loss of control, and encouraged a reified perception of his circumstances.

"The insecurity of employment in the industry is another factor which contributes to the overall lack of normative integration. When a worker is temporarily laid off or required to work short weeks several times a year, he is likely to feel that management views him only as a number, an instrument of production, and not as a human being".⁷³

Chincy, drawing upon his observation of American car workers pointed to the moral ambiguity inherent in worker attachment and conditions of job deprivation.

"Holding a job remains a moral obligation for most people, now considerable moral ambiguity surrounds the actual performance of a job".⁷⁴

In Britain, insecurity of labour has long been recognised as a major characteristic of the motor industry. During the post war period it has been regarded in a number of quarters, as a major background factor in the generation of manifest conflict within the industry. The climate of industrial relations has been strongly associated with the inability of the industry to create a stable working environment based on a regular level of earnings and a degree of certainty in employment. Turner, et al. study of the industry commented,

".....that relatively high earnings and relatively great insecurity are an explosive combination" ⁷⁵

The study claimed that this form of worker insecurity led to earnings opportunism, a situation where workgroups would exploit any possible circumstance to enhance earnings, which, for a variety of reasons were likely to fluctuate sharply.⁷⁶ Beynon, in his study of Ford, wrote of the shop stewards' high rating to job security as the most important factor in an 'ideal job', in terms of the workers' lack of control over events shaping his livelihood.

"The significance attached to job security becomes all the more important when placed alongside the fact that the production of motor cars has been characterised, almost above all else, by instability. The interdependence of the car plants, the proliferation of small, independent suppliers and market fluctuations have synthesised in the lay off and short time working. All of the Halewood workers I talked to had experienced a period of lay off....." ⁷⁷

These impressions confirm earlier evidence produced in America of endemic worker insecurity among car workers and corroborate with more recent investigations undertaken in Britain. The House of Commons Select Committee reported,

"A highly successful industry which is able to offer secure and well paid employment is less likely to face industrial relations problems, and fluctuations in demand

followed by the general depression which the motor industry has experienced have in our view, compounded the difficulties".⁷⁸

The Ryder report on British Leyland published in 1975 pointed to the forces creating worker insecurity, and highlighted the lack of worker control over such events. It said

"We do not subscribe to the view that all the ills of BL can be laid at the door of the strike prone and workshy labour force. While BL has suffered seriously from interruptions to production, these have often been the result of factors outside the control of BL workforce - breakdowns in plant and equipment faulty scheduling, shortages of materials and components, and external industrial disputes".⁷⁹

Despite the considerable evidence of insecurity and 'powerlessness', British car workers demonstrate a remarkable propensity to seek re-employment, often with their former employer, after being discarded through redundancy. Though their conditions of labour have appeared as a cycle of excessive overtime working, periods of short-time, bouts of lay off and frequent redundancies, car workers have remained an exceptionally stable group of workers.⁸⁰

An NEDC report commented, in 1973

"A significant feature of manpower in the UK motor manufacturing industry is the high degree of stability of the workforce".⁸¹

Labour turnover in the industry was reported in 1970-71 to be lower than any other sector of UK manufacturing. For male workers it was less than half the rate of several other sectors of manufacturing. Labour turnover in the British motor industry of 9.6 per cent compared with 75 per cent for the Swedish car industry, some 20 per cent among the Japanese. Absenteeism, at 7 per cent and in the British industry, is half the level recorded for Italian car manufacturing, and less than a third of the levels found in the

German motor industry.⁸²

In Britain, a high dependence upon employment⁸³ for wage-labour, in an economy of low job security, has been reinforced by the ideology of the market. There remains a continued dominance of the 'work-ethic', 'self-help', and 'laissez-faire' values,⁸⁴ which has not only entered into public attitudes towards those without a job, but which have also underpinned the values underlying public provision for the redundant and the unemployed. The existence of such a market ideology suggests that the prime responsibility for the dispossessed status of wage-labour, is more the result of personal inadequacies, rather than the consequence of the workings of the economic system, over which labour generally remains powerless. By placing the emphasis away from explanations based upon the structure of the labour market, and the conditions under which power is exchanged, the ideology of the market place reduces accounts for unemployment to states of individual motivation. Thus workers are, or remain, unemployed because of their 'idleness', 'malingering', or because they are 'lazy' or 'work-shy'. In a more sophisticated presentation of this approach, unemployment is partly explained by personal choice, what economists describe as 'voluntary-unemployment'.⁸⁵

Despite the existence and the objectives of the welfare state, this individualism, associated with a market perspective, has continued to co-exist in British public social policy. Even with the establishment of collectivist provision and universal entitlement, the operation and administration of the welfare state has not, in practice, offended the ideologies of individualism. Quite the contrary, Pinker states

"In Britain there remain deep value conflicts regarding the proper relationship between the individual and the community. Our legally extensive range of public social services derives from collectivist ideologies. At the same time, the ideology of self-help and individualism receives powerful support from the continuing dominance of market values in our lives".⁸⁶

It is not just that market values are confined to the operation of the labour market but that they are brought to directly bear upon those denied employment, through the determination and administration of state welfare itself.

"The development of social policy", argue Wilding and George, "may seem like a victory for socialist views of freedom over classical liberal thinking. This is clearly an over-simplified view. Classical liberal freedom remains a strong continuing element, explicitly and implicitly in social policy legislation".⁸⁷

The collectivist goal of community support established by the formation of a welfare state, can itself, through the values underlying the construction of public policy, as well as the rules and regulations actually governing the practical administration of social welfare, be based upon the ideologies of individualism. The continuing stress upon the individual's responsibility is an endorsement of the ideology of the free market. The Beveridge report, itself a foundation piece of the welfare state, sought to combine the 'work ethic', enshrined in the philosophy of individualism, with a universal, though limited claim to welfare, as the basis of the policy towards the unemployed. The state possesses responsibility only for the maintenance of a minimum subsistence standard. Above this level, the responsibility for survival lay with what Beveridge described as "...the duty and pleasure of thrift".⁸⁸ The administration of benefit entitlement and the application of the 'misconduct role'⁸⁹ can all act to reinforce, rather than counter, market individualism and work discipline,

regardless of the existing economy's ability to provide jobs. A market ideology, however, may appear not only through the exercise of policy values, it can also be endorsed by those to whom the welfare benefits have been designed to assist. Administrative procedures, and welfare 'rights' can not just become the object of social stigma, but the acceptance of market values of self-help itself, by those in most need, can result in their foregoing their legitimate claims.⁹⁰ The ideology of the market, consequently, can exist in what otherwise might be considered as primarily non-market institutions, emerging in the way the issues and objectives of public policy towards the unemployed become defined and executed.⁹¹

In the case of redundancy, however, public policy has had to confront the reconciliation of the workers' attachment to jobs, and his interest in security, with the forces of the market. In 1961, the then Minister for Labour, Mr John Hare, wrote of redundancy;

"The essence of the problem is how to reconcile the workers' natural desire for security in his job with the variations in the demand for labour caused by trading conditions and technical change. The worker cannot be expected to develop a sense of corporate loyalty to the firm for which he works without some assurance that the firm accepts responsibility towards him in changing as well as in stable times".⁹²

On the question of worker security, the enforcement of the rationality of the market in the work-situation, as opposed to the market-situation, remains prone to the possible opposition of the collective worker. Workers, attitudes, values and interests, arising from job-attachment and job-dependence, may present a profound conflict of interest to the management of market economies. It has been upon a recognition of the strong attachments to jobs, and the workers' interest in job security in Britain that public policy over

redundancy has been developed. For despite the high job dependence of wage-labour combined with low job security, and a lack of worker power over the economic forces which shape the insecurity of labour, the insecurity of wage labour has not prevented a struggle for control developing in the workplace. On the contrary, Goodrich, for example, argued that insecurity of labour was a considerable impetus to the early shop floor movements for workplace control, in Britain. He wrote in 1920 that,

"The demand for high pay may strengthen the demand for control. The desire for sure pay - for security against unemployment is even nearer the surface of control schemes". 93

Flanders, in his study at Fawley, in the early 1960's, saw the issue of worker insecurity as being the basis for workplace resistance to managerial initiatives for increased productivity. Although he described how worker apprehension was expressed because of age, work ability, the preservation of established workgroups, the different physical and mental demands confronting the worker, or because of a possible loss in job satisfaction, these causes, he maintained, were essentially feelings of basic insecurity.

"That from all accounts" wrote Flanders, "the common ground in these different reactions was a feeling of insecurity about the individuals' future". 94

On the issue of redundancy Flanders describes an incident in which a trade union official was challenged by the rank and file over the absence of a "no redundancy" pledge in a productivity agreement. Flanders quoted the official as saying;

"That could be taken for granted. No employer in his senses would expect to win consent by such changes without such a pledge". 95

Meyers, in his comparative study of worker security and job rights, considered, that in Britain, the 'right to work' slogan, possessed two distinct levels of meaning for British workers. At one level it endorsed a view that access to employment should be guaranteed through the exercise of public policy.

"In Britain", he maintained, "it carries the meaning that people inherently have the right to make a living and that public policies ought to guarantee this right by providing full employment". 96

It also holds that workers conceive of rights of security in their existing jobs.

"....that they should have some security in their jobs which they happen to hold. Right to work must mean to them not only access to a new job after having lost or quit an old, but also the right to continue in the old". 97

Worker expectations and values, and worker interest in job security in the work situation, appear as integral parts of job control issues and the 'right to work'. Such issues can appear as a cohesive force for the organisation of collective worker power. Clegg says of the issue of redundancy,

"For a group of workers, however, the likelihood that redundancy will bring serious hardship to a few is enough to justify resistance..... solidarity is a potent sentiment among British trade unionists". 98

The exercise of employer power in the workplace on an issue like redundancy invariably is contingent upon the likely, or anticipated, responses of collective wage labour. Meyers reveals an instance in which the issue of redundancy provides differing opportunities to the two-sides of a power relation.

"When discussing the problem involved in reductions in workforces, many British employers indicated that they selected for separation at such times as these workers who had poor records of absenteeism, offences against company rules, incompetence, and the like. When they were asked why they had not been dismissed earlier at the time of

committing the offence, the replies inducted a fear of collective action. At the time of the lay-off, however, the workers were in a much weaker position to protest, since the protection of one worker meant the loss of a job for another".⁹⁹

In Britain, the approach of public policy towards the question of redundancy has been developed upon a contradictory basis of seeking to encourage "a sense of corporate loyalty", yet simultaneously, devising means which weaken the strongly held attachment to jobs, the "well established and deeply held fears of workers for the future of their jobs". Public policy, in other words, has not lain in increasing the level of worker security in jobs, as the basis for initiating change in technology and working practices, rather the contrary, public policy has sought to provide methods designed to shed labour.¹⁰⁰ Consequently the security aspect of public policy lies in compensation for job loss, and not in the merits, rewards, and security in jobs resulting from the sale of labour power. Policy has been based upon what Daniel has described as the "cash solution approach to all problems that bedevils the management of manpower and labour relations in Britain".¹⁰¹ More recently it has been suggested by a section of the Employment Appeal Tribunal, that redundancy policy in a period of mass unemployment amounts to little more than a "bribe to go quietly".¹⁰² Fryer, in his critique of public policy has argued,

"where redundancy is concerned public policy defined the problem largely in managerial terms, that is to say, the 'threat' that has been discerned is the threat of economic and technological stagnation caused by undue restriction of management initiative and the unwillingness of workers to adapt to change".¹⁰³

Rejecting any matter that redundancy can be viewed as a "central national problem" or an issue in which shared interests prevail Fryer maintains that redundancy remains an explicit conflict of

interest. In challenging a consensus approach he states,

Presented in (that) way, it is relatively easy to ignore or avoid an explicit recognition of a conflict of interests as the distinguishing characteristic of both the employment relationship itself and, more especially of its termination, redundancy". 104

Over one hundred and thirty four years ago, John Stuart Mill, after observing the chartist movement in England wrote, in his work on Political Economy,

"The working classes have taken their interests into their own hands, and are perpetually showing that they think the interests of their employers are not identical with their own, but opposite to them". 105

During the present era, Hyman and Brough maintain that,

"Conflict and change are central to the processes involved in industrial relations". 106

The workers' current powerlessness over the events that shape his insecurity in advanced capitalism, does not imply that wage labour entirely accedes to the forces of the market or the power of employer decisions. Workforces, despite levels of deprivation experienced in work situations, possess a dependence upon work, and retain strong attachment and interest in the security of their jobs. Redundancy and job security remain fundamental issues for organised labour in a market economy. This study will proceed to examine the issue of redundancy in the British motor industry, as an issue of power-conflict in workplace industrial relations. It will be maintained that the issue of power has to be approached both as a question of conflict in decision-making, and through a recognition that a substantial conflict of interest exists over questions of redundancy and job security. The study begins with an examination of approaches to the concept of power.

PART I

THE QUESTION OF POWER

Abstract

The question of power, though generally acknowledged in political and sociological thought to be a major concept in the understanding of industrial society, has often proved to be an intractable concept to operationalise for the purpose of either analytical or empirical investigation. In the study of industrial relations, power is viewed as an essential feature in workplace relations. This section will attempt to confront a number of problems associated with the question of power by exploring the ways in which the concept of power has been developed in a selection of theoretical and empirical studies conducted by sociologists, political theorists, and writers in industrial relations.

Following an identification of a number of usages by which power has been conceived among the classical scholars of industrial society it is contended that both consensus and coercion are not necessarily incompatible states by which to characterise societies where the exercise of power is present. However by examining in some detail the political pluralist view of power, being the outcome of a 'key issue' in the decision making process, and the Marxist approach of seeing power being deduced from interests, a number of uncertainties surrounding power remain. In particular the coercive view of power where A has power over B raises a number of difficulties when the application of this equation is applied to institutionalised relationships, be they class relations, or workplace relations. It is authority, as opposed to power relations, within an organised framework which directs attention to the problems of power being exercised through positions within hierarchies, and raises questions of objective power existing in structures as opposed to a subjective notion of power being tied to personality. Neither the political pluralists, nor the Marxists appear satisfactorily to resolve the problem of subject and object, structure and human agency, in the question of power. In general, within both approaches, though they begin from different

surrounding the nature of society, they retain within each approach a mutually exclusive view of seeing either power being tied to the person, or structure.

In the main it is the political pluralists who defend the notion of power being tied to personality, but who find themselves unable to account for the possibility that personality itself may be influenced by institutional and ideological frameworks. Marxists, on the other hand, though they appear to appreciate that power cannot be 'free floating' and indeterminate, appear unable to resolve whether the interests deduced from class positions are expressed in the behaviour of those who occupy class positions, or, whether power resides in the determination of structured production relations. It is concluded that the concept of power ultimately resides in human action. Human action, however, is subject to a number of constraints. Structure in itself, possesses no power. It is only when identifiable structures, or structural variables are acted upon by human agents, in an interaction with others, that power is exercised and structure shapes power. The exercise of power, therefore, is in essence, action. Consequently, the concept of power remains problematical, requiring empirical verification of human behaviour. It is maintained that power should be seen as an explanatory variable, the study of which should proceed from an identification of the structure of organisations and structural variables. The exercise of power must be seen as an outcome of action. Attention must consequently focus upon how structures influence attitudes, motivations, ideologies, and behaviour, and how action shapes strategies, policies, and 'politics', in decision making.

The section begins by reviewing the study of redundancy and claims that power and worker interest in job dependence in the work situation have generally been ignored from the 'social problem', 'economic

efficiency' and 'self-esteem', perspectives which have underpinned the case study treatment of single redundancy situations. Such perspectives have, consequently, largely excluded how the interests of wage labour have organised or responded to managerial power, control, and strategy over job dependence and redundancy in the workplace. The section concludes by maintaining that industrial relations pluralism has inadequately conceptualised the problem of power in workplace relations, and ends by proposing 3 areas by which to approach an empirical investigation into redundancy and workplace relations in the British Motor industry as an issue of the process of power. This part closes with an outline of research strategy methods and sources, and a brief outline of the framework of the remainder of the study.

A major focus in the study of redundancy in Britain has centred upon a concern with the dispossessed workers position in the labour market. The method most commonly adopted in this approach has been empirical investigations of large scale redundancies through a case study. Early examples of this approach were carried out by the Acton Society Trust, following a questionnaire survey of redundant manual workers in three industries, published in 1957.¹ A more detailed study of this kind was undertaken by Kahn, in her investigations of the responses of a sample of West Midland Car workers to the experiences of a redundancy in 1956.² During the 1960's, Wedderburn published the results of her case study of a redundancy among non-manual workers at two plants from the Aviation Industry in the South East of England, and a year later,³ 1965, she produced the results of a case study of closure at two railway workshops, Gorton and Faverdale, in the North of England.⁴ In 1972 Daniel accounted for the movements of redundant workers at Woolwich,⁵ in the job market, while Herron, in 1975 published his study of a sample of 400 workers from Upper Clyde Shipbuilders.⁶

Examples of this kind have provided a diverse body of empirical knowledge of the affects of large scale redundancies upon the condition of wage labour. In general, such studies have sought to measure the human costs of job loss, caused by redundancy through evidence drawn from dispossessed workers experiences in the labour market. Through questionnaires and interviews of the redundant, accounts have been established of the particular difficulties faced by redundant workers in their search for new employment. This accumulated knowledge has produced insights into what job search

strategies were adopted by redundant workers; what particular personal characteristics possessed by the redundant, were significant in their finding new employment, or contributed to the duration of time spent unemployed; how the new jobs of the redundant compare with their redundant jobs; and, what financial and domestic 'costs' were incurred as a result of their redundancy and unemployment experience.⁷

Case studies of this type, which have considered the question of redundancy in terms of the labour market situation, have viewed the issue of redundancy as comprising a 'social problem',⁸ to be understood through a fuller knowledge based around the evidence of individual experiences. These studies have differed from those conducted by labour economists whose concern has been to utilise case studies for the purposes of exploring redundancy as an issue of manpower policy. Here the emphasis has been upon defining the redundant worker as an economic resource, their behaviour in the labour market is consequently assessed in terms of its effectiveness in relation to public manpower requirements.⁹ Examples of this approach can be seen in the study by Reid,¹⁰ of the role of employment institutions in the redeployment of redundant workers, and in the two articles by McKay examining the effects of government economic policy upon redeployment in the West Midlands,¹¹ as well as the more extensive study undertaken with Reid of the redundancy experiences of a sample of West Midland engineering workers from 23 factories between 1966-68.¹² Other examples of economists concerns for redundancy has been the work of Mukherjee, who has questioned the methods for handling redundancies in the context of labour market policies,¹³ while more recently Jenness, has provided a comparative account of the forms of interventionist policies enacted by various states to promote redeployment of manpower.¹⁴

Greenwood and Pearson,¹⁵ on the other hand, have directed attention within the framework of public policy by suggesting that an impact of a redundancy may produce a displacement effect in the existing labour market which may alter hiring standards employed by firms to the disadvantage of those already unemployed in the labour market. Their emphasis is not just upon the personal characteristics of the redundant, and the unemployed, but in a shift towards a recognition that the labour market itself may also be a factor.

Both the 'social problem' approach, and the 'economic efficiency' approach to the study of redundancy centre upon the labour market experiences of redundant workers. Both approaches have relied upon questionnaires and interview schedules of selected samples drawn from among the redundant. Although the objectives of these studies have differed, both approaches have placed considerable emphasis upon the identification of 'personal characteristics' of the redundant, to illustrate the particular social hardship and readjustment involved in redundancy, or, as a feature in the success or failure of economic policy. From the analysis of collated data drawn for the individual experiences in the labour market general summaries of the magnitude of redundancy, either as a 'social problem', or as an aid to the effectiveness of increased 'economic efficiency' have been made.¹⁶

Psychologists have contributed a further dimension in the analysis of the market situation of the redundant worker. In their perspective the question of redundancy has been measured in terms of its impact upon the individual worker. Psychologists have sought to quantify the individual's redundancy experience primarily by accounting for the manner in which the redundant worker comes to terms with his unemployed status. Tausky and Piemount¹⁷ and Kahn and French,¹⁸

have examined the loss of status and the fall in self-esteem, associated with an individuals loss of employment. Strange, in an American study of plant closure, observed that redundancy in a South Appalachian company town led to increased levels of 'fatigue', a 'loss of interest', and, 'inability to sleep', as well as 'difficulties in concentrating' and increased consumption of alcohol among those declared redundant.¹⁹

A common approach among psychologists in their analysis of redundancy and unemployment, has been to place these individuals responses within a staged process.²⁰ The individual's self esteem alters primarily as a result of involuntary job loss. For example, Harrison,²¹ Hill,²² and Briar,²³ have all followed a variation of this approach, first developed by Eisenberg and Lazarsfield,²⁴ during their studies of inter-war unemployment. Harrison, for instance, presents the pattern of phrases through which individuals proceed as being from initial, shock to optimism - pessimism - fatalism.²⁵ Another variant in the psychological perspective, has been to follow Durkheim's classical study of suicide.²⁶ Case studies conducted by Sainsbury,²⁷ Powell,²⁸ Marvis et al,²⁹ Breed,³⁰ and Shepherd and Barraclough,³¹ have all tried to identify unemployment, or redundancy, as a causal factor in suicide rates. Hepworth has recently attempted to correlate occupational skilled differences and duration of unemployment with the state of mental health, and well-being in individuals, who have lost their jobs.³²

The common theme which can be isolated in these three general perspectives on the study of redundancy and unemployment - the 'social problem', 'economic efficiency', and 'self-esteem' - is that they largely centre upon the labour market situation of individuals.

A concern with the labour market situation is essentially a concern with post-redundancy situations. These perspectives consequently generally ignore the influence of the work situation upon the individuals response to the circumstances in the labour market. The value of work to the worker remains non-assessed, work values are assumed rather than explored, while the influence of work experience, the values of work groups, and the impact of workplace organisation remain absent in the accounts of the individual redundant worker's response to both his position in the labour market and in his attitude towards being made redundant.³³ Thus the labour market situation provides only a partial view of the redundancy experience, it perceives the redundant worker in social isolation, and treats him as a malleable entity, which either through a minimum level of public support, or through the possession of particular personal characteristics, will be able to make the necessary individual adjustments to a given market situation.

This emphasis upon the redundant individual gives inadequate consideration to the fact that it is employers, as a result of their hiring policies and practices who ultimately decide new job selections, as it is employers who ultimately declare workers redundant.³⁴ The perspectives of the market situation consequently provides no analysis of the complete redundancy process and experience. It fails also to provide an account either of the structure of power and authority exercised in the redundancy decision, or the influence that the structure of the labour market has upon the subjective responses, both of which restrict the opportunities for wage labour in their labour market and work situations.³⁵ This atomisation of wage labour into market and work situations prevents the possibility that workers in a market economy may, as has already been argued, actually possess

an interest in retaining employment.³⁶ The undue emphasis upon the market situation, in other words, not only prevents an account of the entire process of redundancy but, in so doing, is unable to assess whether redundancy decisions, and the values of workers towards their jobs, or the prospects of job loss, actually enter into workers responses in ways which materially affect the redundancy process. In the absence of such an analysis, the study of redundancy which ignores questions of worker resistance or acquiescence to managerial power in the decision making of a redundancy, is unable to say whether such a factor influences not just worker attitudes to the value of work itself, but also the shaping of their expectations and aspirations in the labour market. As much of the available evidence suggests that redundant workers are invariably downwardly mobile, the redundancy experience perhaps cannot be entirely divorced from labour market behaviour.³⁷

Despite these omissions, in the labour market perspectives, the influence of work and the work ethic as a value remains quite crucial in the underlying values held by the researchers. As Hartley and Cooper point out:

"It is interesting that most studies of redundancy have looked at the period of unemployment in terms of how the individual prepares to get himself back into employment. The period is seen as lacking something (eg. work, status, self-esteem) rather than being perceived as a complete, albeit different way of 'being' in itself".³⁸

The labour market perspective, in other words, in the study of redundancy assumes an ontological work orientated individual, yet excludes from analysis the way in which worker values and attitudes derived from within the workplace, could influence the issue of redundancy. This lack of consideration of workplace influence,

foregoes an analysis of how the basis of worker attachment and job dependence in a market economy, helps both to shape and define worker definitions and attitudes towards the redundancy event. Redundancy research which centres upon the dispossessed individual, isolates the worker from an essential feature of his existence; the value of job security within the prevailing vulnerabilities of the wage labour employment relationship.

Furthermore, the case study approach, with its concentration upon a single issue and event, isolates explanations of this particular incident from the wider experience of workplace relations and issues. This, a historic approach, precludes worker attitudes, values and expectations developed in the work situation, and previous market situations, entering into the analysis of redundancy. For the study of redundancy to take account of such experiences, raises questions not just surrounding the condition of the individual dispossessed worker, but more fundamentally of the process of redundancy itself, within determinations of the wage labour relationship. It has been where redundancy research has taken account of the work situation that redundancy has appeared not just as a 'problem' for the individual worker, but more fundamentally, as the empirical evidence of the incidence of redundancy and unemployment already suggest, an integral issue of conflicting interests confronting wage labour in a market economy. Martin and Fryer claim, that their study of redundancy at Casterton Mill could not be understood in the absence of the historic development of work-based experiences.

".....work was a central concern of Casterton Mills employees, and their interpretations of work experiences, and their attitudes toward work, coloured their attitudes towards other matters. Understanding work attitudes is important for understanding Casterton in general, and the redundancy at Casterton Mills in particular: for it is impossible to understand the redundancy without understanding the significance of what had been lost, the particular job with the particular firm". 39

By focusing attention upon analysis of the redundancy, as opposed to the redundant, the process of redundancy as opposed to the post-redundancy situation of dispossessed workers, questions of the nature of control over redundancy and reactions to that control begin to emerge. As Wood has argued,

"The experience of redundancies reflects the way in which the situation is structured and managed, and reactions to them cannot be understood without recourse to the process by which they occur". 40

An understanding of the process of redundancy raises the possibility of differing interests being exerted. Eldridge, having to forego an explanation of a redundancy based around a "generalised belief system" concluded that,

"....to do justice to the social processes involved in the particular case, it has been necessary to seek to understand the ways in which the various groups perceived their interests and defined the situation in which they found themselves". 41

Viewing the redundancy event in terms of differing group interests, formed from within the position of the collective worker in the work situation, on the one hand, and the managerial control in decision making activity upon the other, raises the possibility that redundancy is an issue which contains a large measure of conflict and power. Selgow, for example, describes how a workforce's responses to a redundancy were primarily conditioned by the structural characteristics of the work situation.⁴² The attitudes towards the actual redundancy were perceived in terms of a power distribution. He says,

".... the men felt themselves and their union to be largely powerless and helpless to alter the situation. Thus there was an overall lack of militancy and a belief that regardless of the men or the unions' opinions or actions very little could be done to influence the situation in which they found themselves. Thus, whilst many men felt the union should have opposed the redundancy, very few thought that they might be successful." 43

But he goes on to argue that such acceptance did not erase the perception that the redundancy was a situation of conflict.

"This does not imply", he writes, "that the men accepted the managements definition of their position. Indeed, many of them saw the situation in conflict terms, so that what was right and justified for the management was wrong and unjustified from the men's point of view". 44

Redundancy and job loss as issues confronting wage labour are part of a dynamic process which affects the workers position not just in the labour market situation of market economies, but it also possesses considerable repercussions for the work situation. While the study of redundancy is to some extent contingent upon facts and information concerning individuals, individual workers do not in themselves exist in social isolation of workgroups, or workplace organisation. Wage labour is located within a particular social structure and is subject to power, and relationships of power, which are exercised within the institutions which function within that society. A study of redundancy, therefore, must go beyond the reductionism implicit in the 'social problems', 'economic efficiency' and 'self-esteem', perspectives. It must not only account for the value of work for wage labour in a market economy it also requires a more informed view of redundancy decisions. Such a perspective, inquiring into the interests, as well as the objectives of policy, and policy making confronts the question of power in decision making. The remainder of this part of the study of redundancy will be centred upon a theoretical discussion of the question of power.

The concept of power has remained a key concept in both sociological and political theory.⁴⁵ It has nevertheless retained a problematical status.⁴⁶ At its sharpest point, the concept in the power debate appears to polarise around two completely opposing propositions. Firstly, that the basis of power in modern society is largely coercive. Secondly, that the basis of power is in fact largely consensual. In a number of writings, elements of both propositions appear, whereupon the dispute shifts, consequently to a discussion of the extent or degree of importance, to be attached to the coercive or the consensual basis of power. Differences in conceptualisation moreover, has led to different conclusions being drawn about the exercise, and distribution of power in actual societies. In order to identify a concept of power with which to proceed to examine redundancy as a key issue of power in workplace relations, it will be necessary to consider a number of conceptual approaches to the study of power.

The traditional approach to power remains embodied in a form of coercive power in which one party is able to involuntarily alter the behaviour of another. This approach takes a form similar to that set down by Bertrand Russell. "Power", he claims, "is the production of intended effects".⁴⁷ The exercise of power is seen as an exchange involving two or more persons in which the power of A over B can produce certain results in B's behaviour. This, a 'zero sum' conception of power has been the basis of the coercive view of power. It stresses the notion that power is essentially subjective, it remains tied to personality, and that the actual exercise of power takes place in a relation to another. In contrast, support for the

consensual view of power appears foremost in the writings of Talcott Parsons. For Parsons, power is synonymous with legitimacy. That is, the exercise of power meets with a general approval, it is sanctioned by the members of a society through an existing common value system. Consequently, power holders are merely carrying out their allotted tasks in the name of a society. Power in decision making is not, therefore, undertaken for a particular mutually-exclusive interest, but rather to realise the collective goals of society which already exist through the large measure of prevailing common agreement.

Parsons writes,

".....the power of A over B is, in its legitimised form, the right of A, as a decision making unit involved in collective process, to make decisions which take precedence over those of B, in the interests of the effectiveness of the collective operation as a whole".⁴⁸

Power in this view is removed from an endemic association with conflict. It is the realisation of a-priori sanctioned community interest, as witnessed by the operation of the social system. Put perhaps more simply, Parsons is accounting for the general absence of overt conflict because of the existence of shared common values, which enter not only into the role of power holders but also into the object of the decisions. This view of power clearly implies different images of society. The coercive view places emphasis upon inevitable conflict and different material interests. The latter view stresses an inherent stability in the workings of social structures; the exercise of power consequently reinforces the functional intergration of the social order.⁴⁹

Among the 'classical' sources of sociology, dual tendencies towards viewing power as coercive, and power as consensual appear. Max Weber, for example, distinguished the aspect of power from the notion

of authority. Within this distinction elements of both the previous views are contained. Consequently Weber defined power as being,

"Power (Macht) is the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests". 50

On the other hand, Weber also talks of authority as being an expression of power relations.

"(Herrschaft) is the probability that a command within a given specific context will be obeyed by a given group of persons". 51

What, for Weber, distinguishes the exercise of power from the exercise of authority is that power is tied to personality (subjective) while authority arises from social position, or role in society, or organisation (objective). As Dahrendorf illustrates,

"The demagogue has power over the masses to whom he speaks or whose actions he controls : but the control of the officer over his men, the manager over his workers, the civil servant over his clientele is authority, because it exists as an expectation independent of the specific person occupying the position of officer, manager, civil servant". 52

Marx also shares a separation in his use of power. On the one hand he sees a society based upon capitalist production relations as being essentially a society in conflict, stemming from the inequalities in wealth (interests) and power relations (class relations). He writes,

"Even the most favourable situation for the working class, the most rapid possible growth of capital, however much it may improve the material existence of the worker, does not remove the antagonism between his interests and the interests of the bourgeoisie, the interests of the capitalists". 53

But he also accounts for ideologies which seek not only to legitimate the prevailing differences in power and wealth, but help also to

conceal the material basis of power relations.

"The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas; hence of the relationships which make one class the ruling one, therefore, the ideas of its dominance". 54

Consequently, for Marx, part of the resource of power ideology, enables power holders to legitimate the unequal distribution through the acquiescence, or compliance, of those subject to power.

While none of the preceding argument is intended to imply that a theoretical convergence can be deduced from these conceptualisations of power, what has to be faced is that differing images of society, characterised either by states of stability, or, from states of conflict, cannot entirely omit that the exercise of power in society, coercive and consensual, cannot be seen as mutually exclusive features by which to categorise the nature of society, or organisations which operate within a society. The features of both tendencies may not only be present in society and organisation but must be taken into account in any formulation of a theoretical framework of power. With this consideration in mind, in the search for a theoretical framework with which to analyse redundancy as a power issue in workplace relations, we will proceed from a critical examination of the pluralist approach to power.

While the concept of power might at first sight appear to be an essential ingredient in the analysis of industrial relations, writers in the industrial relations tradition have displayed a remarkable reluctance to base their research explicitly around a conception of power. Power has appeared to have been largely implicitly, rather than explicitly, involved in the study of industrial relations.⁵⁵

The salience of power, has perhaps been more recently visible in organisational theory, than with writings more closely associated with the study of industrial relations.⁵⁶ There have, however, been a number of notable exceptions to this general assertion, significantly, these have invariably been drawn from those academics sharing a sociological perspective of industrial relations.⁵⁷

Industrial relations pluralists appear, for the most part, to be more concerned with the process of harnessing power, particularly the power of workplace organisation, than with exploring the basis and sources of power, and viewing power as a central conceptual feature in itself.⁵⁸ This focus, perhaps most evident in the 'Oxford School', and among the advocates of industrial relations reform, has displayed more concern with containing power through procedural reform, rather than exploring ways in which the formation of power, and the manifold expressions of power, could be meaningfully constructed as a basis for analysis and comprehension in the study of industrial relations.⁵⁸ This tendency remains perhaps all the more perplexing, given that in the wider arena of pluralist thought the whole disputed question of conceptualising power has remained central to both theoretical and empirical research proceedings.

In this section of the study we will consider certain aspects of the

pluralist debate over power, before entering into an analysis of its major critics. It is then intended to formulate a series of propositions concerning power for the study of industrial relations. The object of this discussion is not to settle the power debate but rather to utilise the disputation over power as a heuristic device for uncovering possible power approaches in the analysis of industrial relations. It is then intended to enlist redundancy as a 'key issue' of power in which to proceed to analyse both redundancy and the phenomenon of workplace organisation in the British Motor Industry.

The Power Debate - Pluralistic Conceptions

The existence of power, and the exercise of power, have, despite the unsettled conceptual status of power in modern society, remained central to the notion of a pluralist society. The question of power, and the resolution of power issues, lies at the crux of the pluralist perspective. The simple test of a pluralist society lies in its assertion of the absence of a single source of sovereign authority. Arguments for a pluralist society consequently arise in opposition to the Hobbesian solution to the problem of order, on the one hand, and counter-poses the notion of a single dominant elite, found in the Marxist theory of a ruling class. The nub of the pluralist argument lies in the contention that in a society that is pluralist, power becomes a competitive resource, which appears fragmented and diffused, and distributed, though not necessarily equally, throughout the society.

There are, of course, many variants associated with why particular societies are, or become, pluralist. The dispersal of power, however, has largely been claimed to be a consequence of the increasing

differentiation and complexity of modern society.⁶⁰ Dahl, a leading American theorist of pluralism, for example, stresses not just the existence of different interests apparent in society, but maintains that their very existence rules out a single interest domination in policy. It is their influence in decision making that provides the major obstacle to a single dominant ruling elite. He talks of "aggregations" of interest being widely spread across society,⁶¹ none of which establishes sufficient homogeneity upon all issues, and neither of which is capable of achieving universal dominance. A fragmentation of interest groups manifest in decision making, characterises the nature of the pluralist view of power in society. Dahl states their claim,

".....that each of them is highly influential over some scopes but weak over many others : and the power to reject undesired alternatives is more common than the power to dominate over outcomes directly".⁶²

This idea of the presence of blocking mechanisms, based upon interest groups, deterring the otherwise unbridled exercise of a single source of dominant power, lies at the centre of Riesmans conception of "veto groups".⁶³ For Riesman power is both "indeterminate and amorphous",⁶⁴ in which even power holders experience conditions of "weakness and dependence", which inhibit the existence of a single hierarchy. He says that,

"where the issue involves the country as a whole, no individual or group leadership is likely to be very effective because the entrenched veto groups cannot be budged".⁶⁵

In similar vein, Galbraith talks of "countervailing powers" preventing class rule in modern society.⁶⁶ Kornhauser takes the argument further. He stresses organisational independence, integrity and democratic control arising out of interest groups, but emphasises their confined roles.

"A wide variety of independent limited-function organisations permits democratic control but also insulates both elite and non-elite from undue interference in the life of the other. This is the situation of pluralist society".⁶⁷

The very diversity of organised interest ensures that, in the pluralist model, all groups have the right to be heard, and an opportunity to exercise power. Pluralism is the open society. As Dahl argues,

"The independence, penetrability and homogeneity of the various segments of the political states all but guarantee that any dissatisfied group will find a spokesman in the political structure".⁶⁸

In pluralist society, policy emerges from a compromise among the various interest groups involved. Policy is the outcome of decision making which is subject to pressures and shifts in the balance in social and political influence. But given the high degree of interest differentiation in a complex society, members of that society owe allegiance to many organisations and institutions, each of which possesses its own, not necessarily compatible objectives.⁶⁹ The individual consequently being subject to a wide degree of choices and cross pressures inevitably values compromise and reason in situations of competing power.

No single group or interest possesses sufficient power to dictate events. The increasing strength of one group is likely to encourage the mobilisation of opposing resources by threatened parties.⁷⁰ It is through the organisations of group interests in which there is a plurality of elites, rather than a single elite, which prevents the maintenance of a dominant powerful elite.⁷¹ The resolution of differences is adjudicated by the State. This overall view of organised power is, however, underpinned by a particular concept of power.

The concept of power shared by the pluralists, and most pervasive in a whole series of community study projects,⁷² has similarities with

Weber's coercive view of power. Dahl, amongst others, in seeking to demonstrate the absence of elite domination in community politics applies the test that, "A has power over B to the extent that A can get B to do something that B would not otherwise have done".⁷³

The test of power to the extent that power is exercised, is based upon the evidence that a change must have been produced. Though it shares with Russell, the subjective attribution of power, what is of significance is that power must produce change. Dahl does contemplate a situation of no change in B's behaviour, as a possible outcome of power, but only in a situation where if A had not behaved as he did, B would have behaved differently to what he did.⁷⁴

The significance of Dahl's view of power is that to have supported the winning side, is not in itself sufficient evidence to demonstrate the exercise of power.⁷⁵ What would have to be proved is that not

to have supported the winning side would have produced a different result.⁷⁶ Furthermore, in terms of interest representation, mere election to office, though it could conceivably lead to the exercise of power, is not in itself a position of power.⁷⁷ For Dahl

potential power is not actual power. It is only when acts change behaviour beyond what they would otherwise have been, that the exercise of power take place. Therefore the right to initiate a policy or initiate an objection to a policy, or present counter proposals, is not the exercise of power. Such activities may be rejected; a situation of no change. The test of power lies in the degree of success measured by change, rather than in the right to initiate, or object.

There are a number of important points which arise from the pluralist

definition of power, which centres upon the outcomes of decisions. Firstly, potential power needs to be distinguished from actual power. For Dahl, exponents of power elites fail to appreciate that "....a potential for control"... is not,...." equivalent to actual control".⁷⁸ Potentiality, in otherwords, has to be manifest in actual practice. As a potential capacity to exercise power can in practice be challenged by veto groups, power, actual power, can only be demonstrated by reference to the outcomes of decisions.⁷⁹ Pluralists, in other words, see power in behaviouralist terms, that is, it is empirically verifiable by analysis of the decision making process. Furthermore, a group with a high potential for power also requires a considerable degree of internal political unity over its actions to sustain its interests. Consequently, for the pluralists, it is not possible to impute power to groups which possess potential resources, there needs also to be an effective level of organised unity within the group. Dahl maintains,

"....a group may have a high potential for control and a low potential for unity. The actual political effectiveness of a group is a function of its potential for control and its potential for unity. Thus a group with a relatively low potential for control but a high potential for unity may be more politically effective than a group with a high potential for control but a low potential for unity".⁸⁰

Easton emphasises the necessary sophisticated political discretion required by interest group leaderships when faced with power conflicts.

"The leadership in a large interest group is constantly confronted with the need to make a decision which, ultimately through the political process, affects authoritative policy. In making such a decision, the leadership must take into account the threat to itself of the existence of various external and internal groups such as parties, other interest groups, and semi-organised competing leadership groups within its own organisation".⁸¹

The pluralist argument with its focus upon decision making, and who

prevails in the outcomes of power decisions, rejects an approach to power which seeks to evaluate power in terms of those who have already gained. The starting point in the pluralist analysis of power, consequently, is not the structure of inequality. The pluralist conception of power in fact, directs attention away from the "interests" of the interest groups by centering upon the mechanisms through which decisions are arrived at.⁸² As a result, pluralists appear to endorse a peculiarly contradictory methodology. They appear to maintain that while it is not the channels of decision making which determines who has power, but rather the ends, - the concrete outcomes of decision making, - in their research, like Dahl's study of power in New Haven, the emphasis remains confined to formal decision making. Dahl therefore remains less concerned with what power is, and directs his observations and analysis to which interest groups have been involved in the procedures of decision making. The pluralist approach is to demonstrate their conception of power through the analysis of selected "key issues". Consequently, pluralists maintain that power is only exercised where conflict is present. There are a number of difficulties which arise from this power/conflict/key issue, paradigm.

Firstly, the selection of a key issue necessarily omits some issues. Pluralists, however, provide no generally accepted criterion for the selection of a key issue.⁸³ Criticism of the New Haven studies has centred more upon issue selection rather than upon the actual findings.⁸⁴ Though it is no doubt true that an issue involving a conflict of interest is, where this conflict is manifest, likely to reveal something of the nature of power over a particular decision, it is also of some importance to know the significance of the issue. While it is clear that some decisions are more important than others,

success in a major decision may be a more significant indication of who has real power than a series of successes in lesser issues.⁸⁵ Furthermore, the confining of the test of power to a limited selection of key issues leaves aside the pervasive nature of power, even in decision making. Janowitz points to the pluralist omission of the, "hundreds of decisions", which taken daily, patterns the processes of social change in particular ways.⁸⁶ Partridge maintains that this exclusion prevents the disclosure of areas of decision making which are more the feature of elite domination.

"....Social change", he suggests, . is not only a matter of taking a series of discrete and distinguishable decisions. Equally important is the slow, non-deliberate, unforeseen, and unintended change : and in this sort of change the influence that is exercised by elites or pace-setting minorities on the masses of men may be a crucial factor".⁸⁷

While some form of selection of the key issue remains inevitable to the pluralist method, this choice clearly becomes of some importance if generalisations concerning the nature of power are to be entered into. Decisions over issues, it could be maintained, are composed of numerous decisions taken at different levels.⁸⁸ The question of what level of decision making and the extent to which decisions determine other decisions are of crucial importance, as is, whether the same issue would reveal the same treatment and outcome in the same location over time, or, in different locations.⁸⁹ Would this be a reflection of the selection of the key issue, the selection of the location, or a reflection of different structures of power?

The pluralist approach to power, moreover, operates upon a number of assumptions, which have given rise to its most sustained form of criticism. Firstly, by concentrating only upon the decision making process, any institutional bias encountered in that process is viewed as being inconsequential to the outcomes of the exercise of

power. Secondly, as the power which the pluralists measure is only determined by reference to the decision making process, it is assumed that all interests are capable of gaining access to this process. Thirdly, that the inherent contradiction between conflicts of interest, manifest in the power struggles of interest groups, and societal stability is reconcilable. Fourthly, compliance in the pluralist model centres around the 'rules of the game', which determines the appropriate mode of behaviour. And fifthly, that there is sufficient common agreement over the impartiality of rules and regulations which strengthens not only a commitment to constitutional means for resolving issues, but such a commitment prevents defeated parties from questioning the manner of resolving conflicts of power. Conflict, in other words, for pluralists, exists within a wider framework of agreed consensus.⁹⁰

A major criticism of the pluralist method for testing for who has power, is the view that their power test is too restrictive.⁹¹ By confining the examination of power to key issues in the decision making process the pluralist approach fails to take proper account of the sources of power and the influence they may exercise in "confining the scope" of decision making to relatively "safe issues". For Bachrach and Baratz, the energies of power may not just be spent in the decision making process, but just as importantly outside the decision making arena, to the reinforcement of social and political values which limit the scope of issues. What they refer to as, 'non-decision' making, may restrict the choice of key issues, through confining the agenda. Power, of this sort, exercised in such a fashion cannot become realised in the pluralist framework. As Bachrach and Baratz put it,

"To measure relative influence solely in terms of the ability to initiate and veto proposals is to ignore the possible exercise of influence and power in limiting

the scope of initiating".⁹²

A second major objection is that the pluralist fail to counter what Schattschneider describes as the "mobilisation of bias"⁹³, the process by which the values of institutional processes legitimate certain kinds of conflicts of issues but suppresses others.

As Easton, for example, suggests,

".....institutional patterns circumscribe not only the decisions of government.... but equally the decisions of other formal organisations such as interest groups themselves".⁹⁴

Bachrach and Baratz consider this occurs in a particular way, the implications of which remain outside the pluralists' concept of power.

"..... a set of predominant values, beliefs, rituals and institutional procedures (rules of the game) that operate systematically and constantly to the benefit of certain persons and groups at the expense of others".⁹⁵

Power exercised through the values and practices of institutions may, in other words, prevent certain conflicts of interest becoming manifest in the decision making process. Pluralists, furthermore, have been charged with not facing up to the distinction between power exercised through authority, and power exercised through domination. Partridge's critique of Dahl centres upon the failure to consider "influence", as a factor of power which could prevent the materialisation of conflict. Where A possesses an influence over B, B may become socialised by A. Consequently, B may subordinate his, "wishes, values, beliefs, or initiatives", to these corresponding with A's.⁹⁶ Power, resulting in a compliance on the part of a subordinate, is being exercised, though it is unlikely to either appear in manifest conflict, or be raised in the decision making process.

In an elaboration of this type of objection, Crenson, illustrates how, in his study of air pollution, the "reputational power", of an interest, the steel corporations, could be exercised without any observed intervention on the part of these companies.⁹⁷ A potential issue of conflict could therefore remain dormant as a result of a potential interest group influencing the outcome of the agenda through its reputation. In such a fashion, the outcome of the decision making process was being shaped in the absence of an interest group participating in decisions.

It has been the insufficient attention to why issues remain uncontested, which may result from the exercise of power, which has placed a serious limitation upon the pluralist concept of power. A challenging group, for example, may well refrain from participation in decision making for what Friedrich labels, "anticipated reactions".⁹⁸ A weaker party may remain inactive out of a wish to avoid anticipated hostility, which may be a likely result of participation. The fear of retribution may appear greater than the rewards of participating, the weak interest group may consciously abstain. A powerful group may even be able to prevent an issue appearing on the agenda, or a challenging group may lack the 'know-how' or the ability to articulate an issue in the decision making process. Under these conditions, an interest group aware of a conflict of interests remains outside the pluralist concept of power, because its interests are not manifest in the formal decision making arena.

There are, however, other instances of this type of "non-issue" which the pluralist cannot take account of. Where a party is unaware of its own interests or where it does not fully organise to articulate its own interest then clearly these interests will fail to materialise

either outside or in decision making. It is not just that a challenging group is inhibited by reputation, or the fear of retribution, both non-issue conditions which exist within a state of conscious self-interest, which do not become manifest, but pluralists fail to acknowledge, and explain, why certain groups remain unaware of their interests. All interests are deemed to be expressed behaviourally as manifest conflicts in decision making. Consequently there is no account by pluralists of the effect particular ideologies, social values, conventions and attitudes, have in the process of defining and shaping what is an interest, what is an issue, what are the acceptable "scopes" for conflict, and what are the unacceptable issues. There is no explanation, no discussion, of what, for example, Gramsci describes as social hegemony, the process whereby subaltern groups exist within a dominance determined by hegemonic groups.⁹⁹ In other words the pluralist primary concern of seeing power in association with conflict, and being manifest in the decision making process, not only detracts attention from the analysis of interests, why and how they are formed, it also fails to explain why certain interests and groups never become realised. Without explanation to the contrary, the possibility that a failure of certain interests to become realised, cannot exclude the possibility that this failure may itself be the outcome of a power relationship.

Non-decision making, therefore, can be extended from the Bachrach and Baratz explanations of conscious, non-decision making being the result of an exercise of power, into an unconscious state. Both these conditions of non-decision making can discount a conflict of interest prevailing, but both are unlikely to be disclosed in the decision making process. Pluralists, through excluding non-

issues, confine power conflicts. through their failure to recognise that power can still be exercised, but not revealed, in decision making. This exercise of power, beyond the reach of the pluralists, would affect the intended behaviour of particular groups. Without an account of these aspects of non-issues, pluralists cannot comprehensively demonstrate that elite dominance has been eliminated. Such an approach to power, however, requires an explanation of interests.

The pluralist approach to power, with too central a focus upon the decision making process, fails to give sufficient weight to the means by which either the conscious or unconscious exercise of power can define certain types of issues worthy of consideration but exclude others. The extension of the power framework by Bachrach and Baratz, to take account of an aspect of non-decision making has largely been concerned with the mechanisms by which certain questions become suppressed. This extension, shares with the pluralists a failure to account for 'unconscious' explanations for non-decisions. That is, to what extent particular judgements prevail in existing cultures, social values, and agencies of socialisation, which prescribe certain kinds of issues as within scopes for power conflicts, but inhibit other issues from becoming socially conscious. An approach to this sort of question pre-supposes a notion of interests.¹⁰⁰

An attempt to partially overcome this difficulty has been put forward by Lukes, in his 3-dimensional model of power. Lukes suggests that the pluralists objection to the imputation of interests by exponents of elite theory, which is not behaviourally present in decision making, can be partly resolved by the recognition of a

'counter factual', in the exchange of power relations. He argues,

"Where there is no observable conflict between A and B, then we must provide other grounds for asserting the relevant counter factual. That is, we must provide other, indirect, grounds for asserting that if A had not acted (or failed to act) in a certain way - and in the case of operative power, if other sufficient conditions had not been operative - then B would have thought and acted differently from the way he does actually think and act. In brief, we need to justify our expectation that B would have thought or acted differently : and we also need to specify the means or mechanisms by which A has prevented, or else acted (or abstained from acting) in a manner sufficient to prevent, B from doing so".¹⁰¹

Lukes, in seeking to overcome both the limitations of the initial pluralist view of power, confined essentially to the decision making process, and the failure to face up to both suppressed issues and unconscious interests, is willing to concede that power could exist which prevents the articulation of interests becoming manifest. But while Lukes, in this way, takes the argument of power forward, he nevertheless shares the pluralist retention of a subjective conception of power.

Lukes, consequently, is seeking to establish a means whereby it is possible to retain the pluralist view that power remains tied to personality, but wishes to allow for the possibility that interests may remain suppressed, owing to the exercise of power. Lukes, while raising the question of the interest of interest groups, which is generally assumed rather than explored by pluralists, retains a subjective view of power and rejects the position that a concept of interests can be derived from empirical evidence disclosing the existence of a power structure. There are, in Lukes conception, no objective interests.¹⁰² It is, however, by returning back to Russell's view, of power, being "the production of intended effects", that a further serious deficiency emerges in the behaviouralist

perspective of the pluralist view of power. Because pluralists do not pay sufficient attention to the "interest" of interest groups they exclude certain "affected" parties. Where interests, in other words, are not being overtly expressed over an issue, pluralists assume that this is because the issue holds no interest. If, however, the view of Balbus is accepted, that "interest in", is taken to mean, "affected by" then clearly it is likely, if not probable, that the interest of others, besides those party to decision making, are likely to be implicated, and, as a result, interested in decisions and issues. As Balbus argues,

".....it is certainly possible, indeed likely, that political issues or decisions implicate individuals, in the sense of altering dramatically their life-chances, even if they express or hold no preferences with respect to them. We would certainly want to say, for example, that individuals who did not have any preferences with respect to governmental fiscal policy or monetary policies were interested in, ie. affected by, changes in these policies which might drastically affect their chances for employment". 103

While such a position does not necessarily pre-suppose imputed objective interests, it certainly presents important difficulties for a behaviouralist concept of power. "Anticipated reactions" and "affected by" interests, remain significant exclusions from the pluralist view of power, but where the subjective basis of power has been extended for application to power in organisations, social groups or social classes, more fundamental limitations appear in the pluralist conception of power. We will proceed to consider the case for the objective interest basis of power, found in elite theory, before framing a number of propositions integral to the study of power.

A number of fundamental questions arise in the application of both the pluralist view of power, and in the critique established in the perspectives of non-decision making, when the essentially subjective concepts of power are applied to organisations or collectivities, be they institutions, social groups, or social classes. The limitations of these conceptions of power are particularly apparent in their application to workplace relations. Unlike the general abstract proposition of power symbolised by the A-B equation, class, and workplace relations do not appear as interchangeable positions.¹⁰⁴ Power, in other words, being exercised by such groups is normally located in an already predetermined hierarchy of authority, roles, and values. Furthermore, the A-B relationship, portrayed by the pluralist, projects an individualised, a - social, and a - historic basis for the measurement and analysis of the exercise of power. The pluralists approach to power through the analysis of who gains in key issues, not only fails to explain the formation of interests of the interest groups it considers, but accepts the position of both parties as a given. Consequently, not only are interests assumed and not accounted for, the relationship between the two parties also appears as a given. The pluralists, as a result, take no account of the view that not only has the status of the different parties to decision making been shaped by their historical development, but that the relationship between the parties may itself be a product of history.¹⁰⁵

The pluralist approach to power not only poses the status of both parties as a given, and not as the product of a historical

relationship, but neglects the extent to which parties are the subject of a variety of influences both from the exercise of power within; arising from its constituted membership, and from power without; the outcome of the interaction with other related power groups. The relationship between the two interacting groups, within an organised hierarchy of power, cannot be entirely observed by reference to a key decision. Both sides, to some extent, are victims of their own history, as well as seeking to exercise an influence upon their own future. Both of these features may not only be interrelated but have a direct bearing upon the existing exercises of power in key decision making.¹⁰⁶

In industrial relations, for example, the application of the A-B power relationship to management and workforces, is not interchangeable. The power relationship is institutionalised and structured upon a prescribed allocation of roles and fixed responsibilities. As Bendix writes,

"All economic enterprises have in common a basic social relation between the employers who exercise authority and the workers who obey".¹⁰⁷

Power, in the form of authority, in workplace relations is both universal and omnipresent. Despite the evident structuring of roles in industry, differentiation within a hierarchy of decision making separates 'power-for', from 'power-over'. Dahrendorf maintains,

"So called hierarchies of authority are in fact hierarchies of the 'plus-side' of authority, ie. of the differentiations of domination: but there is in every association, also a minus side consisting of those who are subjected to authority rather than participate in its exercise".¹⁰⁸

Dahrendorf, while accepting the view of modern society being a

fragmentation, comprising of competing groups, recognises also that the appearance of such groups are not entirely a random phenomena.¹⁰⁹ The presence of a hierarchy and a structure of roles, places limits upon the assumed 'openness' and 'diversity' apparent in the pluralist framework. Though conflict still exists, it is confined to the social groups operating within an hierarchical structure. For Dahrendorf, interest groups are a derivation of power relations, in which ownership in production relations remains only one aspect of the power relation.¹¹⁰ Consequently, Dahrendorf attempts to develop the pluralist perspective into the important question of structure, while seeking to retain the pluralist view of competing power groups. Lukes, in overcoming the limitations of Dahl, and the problems posed by non-decision making, placed stress upon interests between power groups, and not just upon the pluralist concern for policy preferences. He was, however, reluctant to derive the determination of interests from structure, for the purposes of power analysis, owing to his retention of a subjective view of power tied to personality. Dahl, on the other hand, rejected the position that power could be analysed from either potential, or imputed, conditions; it had to be seen to be exercised to be seen to have taken place.

Marxists, who maintain that economic power is unequally held, claim that it is exercised in the interests of particular minority interests, of particular classes. Westergaard and Resler, for example, reject the pluralist view that power is fragmented in the way it is claimed.¹¹¹ However, they do not exclude that a "dominant group" may have to make concessions to organised labour, "in order to retain power and privilege",¹¹² but they claim that this contested area of power does not actually challenge what they refer

to as the "core assumption" of modern society. In placing considerable stress upon the non-decision making aspects of power, Westergaard and Resler maintain,

"The core assumptions of our society are firmly in line with the interests of one small group". 113

They go on to argue, not unlike Miliband, 114 that the sociological and empirical evidence of elite-recruitment is "not irrelevant to the study of power". They write,

"For such information suggests the extent of ties of association and common sympathy within ruling groups : the experience and perspectives which are likely to influence policy, the limits on the capacity of rules to influence others".115

Both Westergaard and Resler, following Miliband, provide a sociological class identity of elites while suggesting a sociological association of elite interests based upon economic position and class membership. As Westergaard and Resler put it,

"We see interests as the possibilities and potential objectives of action which are inherent in economic positions regardless of whether the incumbents of these positions in fact so define their objectives at any given time". 116

While rejecting the psychological reductionism implicit in the pluralist conception of power¹¹⁷, Westergaard and Resler present an unspecified view of power. It is merely associated with role or position and deduced from interests. Miliband, in his somewhat similar approach, argues that the first requirement in power analysis is,

"....not to determine whether an economically dominant class would wield decisive economic power...." but...
"rather to determine whether such a class exists at all".118

Miliband's starting point is one stage removed from the pluralists; it is not just who exercises power but what groups hold what kind of power. He proceeds to associate the existence and possession of unequal economic power, to the exercise of bias and inequality, in decision making. Through a sociological identification of shared common values, similar class positions, a common "circle of relations", "friendship patterns" and "shared acquaintances" Miliband holds that "the interests of business" are upheld.¹¹⁹

He considers,

"As a result of that power, the men - owners and controllers - in whose hands it lies enjoy a massive preponderance in society, in the political system, and in the determination of the state's policies and actions"¹²⁰

What Miliband, Westergaard and Resler are advocating is that, from a sociological examination of positions held in society, if it can be reasonably established that where those who hold dominant positions within an unequal society or economic organisation, are also those who benefit from the unequal basis of that society, it can be plausibly accepted that those who hold positions of dominance, do so because they have an interest in the preservation of a particular form of unequal society. Therefore, to determine who has power, and why power is exercised, it is necessary to reveal the interests of the personnel; the powerholders.

This approach to power is perhaps most clearly expressed by Miliband's objection to the pluralist contention of 'managerialism'; the view that ownership and control in industry have become divorced, because the control of the modern, large-scale firm no longer resides in the personality of the legal owner(s), but in the management. He counters the pluralist claim by setting out, by way of empirical evidence, to establish that an economically dominant class does

decisively wield economic power. He rejects the pluralist claim, partly on grounds that such an elite does significantly exist and that it shares capitalist values, and seeks to establish sociologically that managers are "mainly drawn from the propertied and professional classes"¹²¹ with a large measure of hereditary recruitment to elite positions. Managers, he claims, being largely "self-recruiting", possess marked degrees of social cohesion. And that the differences that exist are "safely contained within a particular ideological spectrum, and do not preclude a basic political consensus in regard to the crucial issues of economic and political life".¹²² Miliband concedes that differing, competing elites may be present but that such differences are within a sphere of commonality, derived from agreed interests and objectives.

"This 'elite pluralism' ", he suggests, "does not, however, prevent the separate elites in capitalist society from constituting a dominant economic class, possessed of a high degree of cohesion and solidarity, with common interests and common purposes which far transcend their specific differences and disagreements".¹²³

For Miliband the undoubted power of an economic elite is not in question, it is rather more a matter of demonstrating that this cohesive group also exercise considerable power over the apparatus of political decision making. That this dominant economic elite extends its power and affluence in the state, power, stems from the existence of general agreements over common interests. Whereas Miliband, Westergaard and Resler, see power originating from interests in which the pluralist separation of the ownership and control being exercised in decision making in industry is not in reality a distinct competing category, because managers largely share similar interests with corporate property owners, this challenge to the pluralist conception of power is, itself, ultimately based upon a subjective account of interests. What is being suggested

is that management not only operates within an acceptance of the profit motive, but also formulates policies within capitalist interests, which are their interests.¹²⁴ In this approach, to the study of power, there is no specified account of capitalist interests other than by general association with the existing economic inequality. The power derived from interests, in other words, is being maintained by reference to the interests of individuals who hold positions in the economic elite. This view of power sees social classes as the main basis for differing interests and consequently begins from the point of pluralist weakness, the unexplored status of the interests of interest groups. While it sees class interests as comprising a far broader basis for the evaluation of interests than Lukes is willing to allow, it shares with Lukes the view that power and interests are to some extent subjective, derived from the motivations of individuals.

This class approach to power moves substantially away from the pluralist view of power residing in decision making. It seeks not only to acknowledge that power is exercised in decision making, but what also is of some consequence, that interests and motivations are an important aspect of power. The class arguments against the pluralists, however, centres very largely not just upon the undisclosed interests, but how these interests effect substantial areas of non-decision making, that is, how interests operate to exclude or suppress certain kinds of interests from becoming realised, in decision making. Miliband, Westergaard and Resler's critique of pluralism attempts to extend the subjective view of power, from an exclusive concentration upon decision making, into a class view of interests based around Bachrach and Baratz conception of non-decision making.¹²⁵ This class analysis, however, comprises a large measure

of causal association of interests and a subjective evaluation of actual power. Poulantzas, writing from within the social class perspective, and endorsing the view that power is an expression of interests, has been a leading critic of the class conception of power interests so far presented. Although Poulantzas does not disagree over the empirical sociological evidence, he bases his objections, and his conception of power, from within a highly structured framework.¹²⁶ He consequently argues, in opposition to organisational theorists, that interests can be derived from just the structure of roles within an organisation,¹²⁷ but he further opposes the class view presented; that interests can be deduced from the subjective motivations of social actors, carrying out their particular roles.¹²⁸ While he is not denying that a sociological account of interests can infer a connection with holders of power, his main objection is that a group or organisational interests, cannot adequately be comprehended through a reductive account, based upon interpersonal relations. For Poulantzas interests remain determined by their objective place in production relations, and by the objective character of ownership in the means of production. Power, for Poulantzas, consequently appears as the objective capacity of a class to realise its interests.

"By power", he argues, "we shall designate the capacity of social classes to realise its specific economic objectives".¹²⁹

Poulantzas presentation of power is the outcome of his general theory of the structural determined character of capitalist society. Power appears as

"....an effect of the ensemble of the structures".¹³⁰

This theory of structure provides a determined view of class domination which possesses both a view of objective interests and

specific interests of class factions.

The Poulantzas view of power stems from his theory of social classes. It is largely based upon a theory of social structure. Classes and class relations appear structurally determined by production relations. Social classes remain the outcome of structurally determined economic, and to a lesser extent, political and ideological relations.¹³¹ In an important development of the power debate, Poulantzas, not only presents structure as determining objective interests, but also as determining the role of agents in the structure of classes and class determined production relations. Managers, consequently, like other agents, fulfil an objective position.¹³² As agents of capital, their roles are structurally determined. In their role as agents, managers appear as bearers, '*träger*', of structural and objective interests.¹³³ As a result they do not possess roles and practices, which are independent of the functions ordinarily undertaken by the owner capitalist. Managers as agents, therefore, do not appear as a distinct interest group, they do not form a "class faction".¹³⁴

The significance of the designation 'agents' in this approach to class analysis, is that it is a category which identifies an actors position, not so much in terms of the variegation in human behaviour, or from an identification of class origin or class motivation, nor, in fact from deducements from an organisational objective, or organisational policy; but in terms of the universal structure of production relations. The power position of agents, therefore, is determined by the position they occupy in the structure of production relations. Consequently, the subjective motivations of individuals, for Poulantzas, remains non-essential in the identification of the

functional location of class position.¹³⁵ "Profit" itself, for example, appears as an objective category of capital rather than the pursuit of human endeavour.¹³⁶

If, as has been earlier outlined, power is associated with personality, and acts of the person, in which elements of discretion and choice are at stake, a completely determined structure of relations negates the view of exercised power. The bearer of structure possesses no element of subject.¹³⁷ Consequently, over-determination remains a denial of autonomy. It would discount differences in conduct, policy, and strategy, on the part of organisations and classes, in conflicts over power.¹³⁸ As Miliband remarks, in regard to the position of management, there would, in Poulantzas framework, be no "political character to managerial control".¹³⁹

Poulantzas theory of structure allows only for "relative autonomy"¹⁴⁰ to be exercised between the state and class factions, but the designation agent can possess some significance in the identification of power, role, and interests in production relations. In terms of the question of the location of management in large firms, Renner,¹⁴¹ for example, maintained that in these circumstances the owner of capital became related to the firm merely upon the basis of interest; the interest to materially appropriate from his investment. He, consequently, distinguished "economic ownership" - the legal right to benefit - from "technical ownership" - the control exercised over the means of production.¹⁴² Actual ownership was reduced to a relation of interest, the interest of profitable investment. Poulantzas, however, in his more complete theory of structure follows Bettelheim's distinction between "legal ownership" being a nominal right to benefit, while "economic ownership" is

designated with the power of appropriation and control,¹⁴³ owing to its power-over the labour process. A decisive break in this line of thought emerges with Carchedi.¹⁴⁴

Carchedi makes the point that, from an analysis of social structure, legal owners appear more important, but from an analysis of production relations, they do not possess the same significance.¹⁴⁵ What is important about "managerial capitalism" is that the manager appears as a central figure.

"He" (the manager), states, Carchedi, "rather than the rentier is the non-labourer, non-producer, the exploiter. Capital personified".¹⁴⁶

Carchedi, bases his theory of capitalism around two concepts, both determined by the relations to production. It is the domination of the labour process, and of the surplus value production process,¹⁴⁷ which govern the reproduction of social classes. Both of these processes rest upon production relations, "which bind together the agents of production and the means of production". He claims,

"The reproduction of social classes depends on the reproduction of both positions (in the hierarchy of capitalist relations) and agents of production".¹⁴⁸

An agent of production, for Carchedi, is all embracing.

"Everybody, simply by taking part in the capitalist process, ie. simply by occupying a certain position, automatically becomes a carrier of the capitalist production relations.". ¹⁴⁹

Carchedi's use of the term agent enables him to establish a "correspondence" between capitalist interest and roles.¹⁵⁰ His concept of agent, however, appears much broader than that presented by Poulantzas. For Carchedi, agent, is anyone who performs any aspect, no matter of what consequence, of the "global function of capital". He claims,

"Agents need not own the means of production and yet perform the global function of capital : they perform it collectively, and in a hierarchical structure and in new forms, what used to be the function of the individual capitalist". 151

Agents, thus, appear as delegated functionaries of capital, their global function is not just located in the position of manager, but is extended to all states of lower grade supervision. Furthermore, this delegated function need not be confined to roles internal to the organisation, they can also be delegated to external positions, for example, employers federations, Management Consultants, or even, Social Scientists promoting particular managerial techniques.¹⁵²

A designate position of agent, in regard to the internal relations of the workplace need not be confined to those in roles of exploitation , the "global function of capital" can, in certain instances, be undertaken by the exploited - wage labour.¹⁵³ While a dual function of exploited and exploiter can exist within the same role, classically in the case of positions of lower supervision, it can also appear in the actions of workforces and their representatives. Where union officials, and workplace representatives, or wage labourers themselves, assume an aspect of managerial responsibility for the voluntary subjection of their activities, for example in job-enlargement, job-enrichment, or schemes of, worker participation. Carchedi, from his concept of agent, maintains that such action corresponds to the traditional managerial "global function of capital".¹⁵⁴

Both Poulantzas and Carchedi, present a highly structured view of social classes in which an identification of interests is derived from an objective view of the structure of capital and capitalist social relations. Though they both start from the structure of production relations, Carchedi appears to go much further in his designation of

agent, which fulfills the personified "global function of capital" in the labour process. The conception of agent, and the delegated function of capital, enables Carchedi to maintain, that dual, contradictory purposes can be maintained within the same functionary. An agent, the personification of capital, can possess a dual function, a double identity. It can both undertake "the global function of capital", and the function of the collective worker". What Carchedi identifies as the "new middle class" is characterised by these contradictory tendencies. It appears in its classic form in the role of managers and supervisors, but is capable of application to a partial voluntary subordination of the collective worker and his elected representatives in the workforce, where they undertake responsibility for the delegated functioning of managerial capitalism.

Through his analysis of social classes, based upon both the concept of the labour process and the surplus value process, Carchedi, is able to ascribe and distinguish in the structure of class and production relations, roles determined by the ownership and non-ownership relation. The distinction between these relations to production and relations of function, appears in agents, the bearers of the personified function of capital. The interests of capital emerge in antagonism between producer and non-producer while the position of functions is allocated a specific technical content.¹⁵⁵

Power appears as the realisation of capitalist interest undertaken by the functionaries of capital. Certain groups, however, can perform both the function of the collective worker and the "global function of capital". Antagonism not only reveals itself between the producer

and non-producer, but is implicit within the dual function undertaken by certain groups within the relations of production. It is at this level, that Carchedi introduces "relative autonomy"¹⁵⁶ Agents can therefore appear in "correspondence" or in "contradiction" with the ownership interest.

Both Poulantzas and Carchedi seek to demonstrate that power, as an organised interest, can be structurally located around relations to production. They appear to overcome the limitations of the sociological identification of interests approaches, of Miliband, and Westergaard and Resler, with its imputed notion of power. Poulantzas, however, appears to deny the association of power to personality. His structural view of power and class interests appears to prevent allowances for role discretion or political strategy in power conflicts and power decisions. The relative autonomy that exists, operates externally to the internal organisation of capital. It is a relation of state hegemony over class factions, in order to sustain a balance of ruling class forces. Carchedi, on the other hand, is willing to allow relative autonomy within the functions of structured roles, on the basis of an overall objective determination of capitalist interests.

In the question of power we have seen that the study of power can be approached through an analysis of behaviour in decision making following the selection of a key issue over which verifiable overt conflict, arising from policy preferences, takes place. The extension of this approach in power analysis has retained the decision making focus of power but tried to also account for non issues and potential issues by identifying who controls the agenda. Instead of just concentrating upon actual power in decision making, the widening of

the decision making focus has raised questions about potential power. It has inquired about institutional bias, reputational power, influence, anticipated reactions, fear of retribution, in issues which go uncontested. The major objection to this approach has centred upon the question of interests, and the mechanism by which either subjective or objective real interests become either manifest or remain suppressed, due to the exercise of power, outside the decision making arena. Running through all these approaches, however, there remains an unresolved, and at times ambiguous, epistemological question over the status of the human agent in the exercise of power. This question becomes particularly acute in the study of power within institutional environments.

Diagram 2.1 presents, in a simplified form, the dilemma of the status of the human agent which arises in the question of power. This aspect of power has important implications, not only for the definition of power, but also, for the analysis of power.

Diagram 2.1: Power Determination and Human Agency

(outcome variables)	(influence variables)	
	<u>Structure</u>	<u>Human Agency</u>
<u>Determined</u>	100%	NIL
<u>Autonomous</u>	NIL	100%

Where structural variables possess greatest influence, then behaviour is determined, and the influence of human agency is weakest. However,

where the influence of human agency is strongest, behaviour is more autonomous, and less the result of structural forces.

In the pluralist approach to power, the difficulties which arose were not just problems which required the recognition of the limits of the study of decision making, as the appropriate arena for formal struggles. Nor, furthermore, was the dispute just a matter of settling the important question of issue selection. The criticism within the scope of the decision making view of power, was also an argument of institutional bias. So that while Bachrach and Baratz, Lukes, and Crenson, for example, endorse the view of power within the decision making framework, and share with Dahl and Polsby, that power is tied to personality, they appear, perhaps, contradictorily, to concede that institutions of decision making, or the bias stemming from institutions, can be an influential variable in the exercise of power.¹⁵⁷ So despite an apparent objection to a structured view of power, and a rejection of considering power as a derivative of interests based upon objective empirical evidence of association of interests, the acknowledged limitations of the behaviouralist view of power, being exclusively the property of human agency, is only overcome through an acceptance of institutional bias, as a structural variable in power determination.

It is, however, when the question of power is considered within an institutionalised relationship, either between social classes, or within an organisation, interest group, or in terms of relationships to production, that the problematic of structure appears more apparent. The dispute, is again, not just one of the implications surrounding the exclusion of interests as a factor in power determination, important although that is, it is also the problem that the

behaviour of the human agent is not entirely random, but rather, it is located within an organised structure of hierarchical positions. Structure, in other words, is not just a derivative of interests, but also an essential allocator of prescribed roles, and a distributor of specific degrees of formal power and authority to the holders of those roles, the power holders.

The pluralist view that power in decision making, and the Marxist view of power in interests, not only reveal differing methodologies, but pose clear differences in their conception of industrial society. But within the Marxist framework, ~~whi~~ a general agreement exists about the nature of society, a disagreement is apparent which polarises around mutually exclusive explanations based around either subjective frameworks of shared common interests, and the motivations of human agents in power positions, like managers in organisations, ~~of~~, the opposing view, that power, and with it the human agent, itself, are structurally determined. While Miliband, and Westergaard and Resler, appear to sympathise with the former, Poulantzas, and in a more qualified way, Carchedi, appear to favour the latter. The question of power, consequently, in both the pluralist frameworks and the Marxist frameworks, endorses not just different images of industrialised societies, ^{but} there also exists within both approaches a dichotomy over structure and human agent.

The subjective view of power, in which power appears tied to the free floating individual, is unable to account for individual behaviour itself being patterned by societal norms, values, and ideologies, which may themselves be the outcome of particular power interests. The structural view of power, which stresses the importance of hierarchical positions of authority accepts that the social individual

cannot be entirely free floating, but, social man himself cannot be completely conditioned either. He is not an automaton responding mechanically in structured roles in the organisation. The exercise of power, as Allen maintains, ultimately possesses a human dimension.

"Power", he claims, "is exercised in the last analysis by people. Men and women, not guns, bombs or machines, make decisions about it". 158

The concept of power may be seen as an explanatory variable, but it cannot be viewed as a variable, independent of human action. Although it may be contingent upon a structural variable, it must be mediated through the human agent. So that, for example, while the allocated roles in the structure of the organisation are the basis for the formal distribution of power and authority in an organisation, and, for instance, technology can appear as a variable in the work situation, and the labour market, product market, or corporations budget, may be objective variables identified in redundancies, none of these structural variables exercise power in themselves. Power is only exercised when action, which may or may not be constrained by structural variables, takes place. Structure, and structural variables require that the constraints they establish enter into the beliefs, values, consciousness, opinions, or attitudes, of the actor, in such a way that the actor chooses to act in a particular way.¹⁵⁹ The question of power, therefore, cannot exclude the structure of the organisation, or the existence of structural variables, but only in so much as they affect beliefs and opinions, etc, in such a way that they have outcomes in decision making and policy, or induce compliance in human behaviour. Consequently, structure and human agency are indispensable forces of power generation and power affects. Omission of either retards the understanding of power. As Abell, argues,

".....that in order to understand the determination of organisational outcomes, like the nature of the control system and ultimately effectiveness, it is initially important to understand the effect of constraining variables, but it is also important to understand organisational participants beliefs and their relative influence and power." 160

Constraining variables in the organisation is not power but rather a resource. Resources only become transmitted into power when they are acted upon by individuals or groups.

The study of power in other words, requires not only an analysis of the constraining variables in the structure of organisations but also how the human agent acts. The power of A over B requires that we not only examine structure, which may be a resource within which A acts, but we need also to focus upon how structural variables enter into the beliefs of A, and how combined with the beliefs of A, they enter into the formation of policy, strategy and the decision making process, so as to affect the behaviour of B. However, we also need to examine how the beliefs, expectations, and interests of B, affect his behaviour in response to the initiated action of A. The exercise of power in industrial societies generally exists within structured relationships, which constrain, but cannot eliminate, discretion and choice, being exercised by the human agent. Without the possibility of discretionary action by the human agent, power could not exist. Power consequently, exists within constraints which are acted upon, in an interaction comprising individuals, groups, or the representatives of institutions.

In the final part of the question of power, we take up some of these considerations in a critical evaluation of the notion of joint regulation found in the institutional approach to power in industrial relations.

5 REDUNDANCY AND WORKPLACE RELATIONS : A DIALECTIC OF POWER
CONFLICT.

The position of wage labour in the market economies of industrial societies, is largely grounded in an ambivalent position of job insecurity and job dependence. Insecurity remains a feature both of the experience in the labour market situation and the work situation. Redundancy and unemployment both appear as issues which directly affect the life chances of significant sections of the working population and which have not inconsequential economic, social, and psychological effects upon the status of the individual in a market economy. Although the impact of a lack of job security remains unevenly distributed across class, age, sex, and industrial sectors, it is, however, among the manual sections of the workforce, especially the lesser skilled that the propensity to both unemployment and redundancy experience is greatest. Yet given this high vulnerability to job insecurity and high dependence upon employment, the position of wage labour in a market economy is profoundly ambiguous.

In the power structure of an industrial organisation the position of the manual worker is characterised by his, or her, lack of formal authority. The distinction between 'salaried employee', and 'weekly wage earner', 'office' and 'shop floor' worker, 'non manual' and 'manual', 'black coated', and 'blue collar' worker, are not just functions arising out of the division of labour within the organisations. Nor are they only variations which emerge from different market, work, and status situations.¹⁶¹ In general, these divisions are also associated with differences defining those who exercise formal authority from those who hold subordinate positions in the organisation. It is this production relationship which is

reinforced by an array of differentials, privileges, and amenities.¹⁶²

But while manual wage labour does not possess authority in the formal hierarchy of industrial organisations, it is not without power. It is power and not authority which characterises the position of manual wage labour. Wage labour appears in a dialectical relationship to the ownership and control of the organisation, as it does not own what it produces, yet does not formally control what it most depends upon, employment security. Though the worker remains formally powerless, and alienates the product of his labour, he retains ultimately a level of control through his capacity to work. The contract of employment is therefore a power relationship. For the employer the works rules form the basis of his rights over the employee in the workplace, but the worker still retains his human capacity to labour, so that while he formally submits himself to the authority of the employer, in the exchange of his potential to labour, he retains a measure of discretion and personal, or collective, autonomy over the actual performance of his work tasks.¹⁶³ The objective function of management is to maximise the workers potential productive activity in the interests of capital accumulation. In workplace relations, consequently, power is a crucial variable which determines the outcome of the relationship between management and the worker.

The formal outline of the relationship embodied in the contract of employment is not without considerable complexity and uncertainty. In the study of industrial relations, perhaps the most influential school of thought, industrial relations pluralism, has developed from a critique which has recognised the limitations of managerial control being based exclusively upon relations of formal authority. Fox, for example, characterises the unitary or traditional view of

industrial organisation in terms of a system of authority rather than power relations.

"A unitary system", he suggests, "has one source of authority and one focus of loyalty, which is why it suggests the team analogy.....Each accepts his place and his function, gladly, following the leadership of the one appointed. There are no oppositional groups or fractions, and therefore no rural leaders within the team".¹⁶⁴

Industrial relations pluralism is primarily concerned with power rather than authority relations. The question of power, however, is less a concern with how power is exercised, the main focus is directed towards ways of reconciling and restricting the full use of power in labour relations. Flanders and Fox define the question of power as the existence of a "multiplicity of separative normative systems".¹⁶⁵ whose aspirations appear to challenge the prevailing norms which regulate behaviour in an industrial relations system. They write,

"We must thus speak of these groups having normative aspirations. Power is the crucial variable determining the outcome in such a situation. One group may have been able to impose its preferred normative system upon other groups, but a subjected group can always mobilise power on its own account, formulate normative aspirations, challenge the prevailing norms, and force an agreed compromise. It may then be able to secure permanent acceptance of a process of bilateral regulation, or if it is powerful enough, unilaterally impose its own set of norms in substitution for the existing set".¹⁶⁶

This view accepts that conflict is an inevitable aspect of industrial relations, and power remains crucial to outcomes between norms and aspirations, but it sees consensus as the alternative to resolving issues by the exercise of power.

".....the greater the degree of consensus between the normative aspirations of the various groups involved, the less the overall tension and the less the invocation of power in attempts to reduce that tension".¹⁶⁷

The approach of industrial relations pluralism, though it accepts a

degree of conflict, and acknowledges legitimate differences of interest existing in the workplace, seeks to avoid overt expressions of power conflicts by establishing institutions whereby joint responsibility exercised by both management and the trade union organisations can regulate industrial relations in both the market situation and in the work situation.¹⁶⁸ The main instrument for achieving this is collective bargaining. For industrial relations pluralists, collective bargaining not only possesses the possibility of institutionalising relations between management and unions at a representative level, through agreed bargaining procedures, but seeks to regulate behaviour in the workplace through joint agreements to regulate jobs; what is termed "job regulation".¹⁶⁹

Collective bargaining consequently transforms the question of power from that of A having power over B, relationship, into one of joint regulation whereby A and B both share responsibility for regulating behaviour through negotiated agreements. Thus the dependence of wage labour upon jobs takes the form of a relationship between institutions. Harbison, for instance maintains,

"Collective bargaining.... is strictly a relationship between organisations and not.....a relationship between management and workers".¹⁷⁰

Collective bargaining increases institutional joint responsibility for the regulation of workplace relations by seeking to transform what Flanders describes as control by "conjunction", in which either side retains unbridled control over a working practice in the work situation, to one of "co-operation" in which management and union organisation come to recognise the "factual interdependence" of their relationship.¹⁷¹ The job dependence of wage labour thus becomes transformed into an institutional relation of organisational

mutual interdependence. Chamberlain claims that there appears a position of dependence in which either side recognise that they can achieve their institutional objectives more effectively aided by the support of the other.¹⁷² A condition which Kerr terms as "a philosophy of mutual survival".¹⁷³

Industrial relations pluralism both rejects the view that formal authority can exclusively regulate workplace relations, but equally, it rejects the human relations view that personal needs and interests of the worker in the work situation can normally be met through more effective personnel administration,¹⁷⁴ or are necessarily compatible with the objectives of the industrial organisation. Instead collective bargaining is seen as a means for institutionalising power conflict by confining relationships between management and workforces to relations conducted through formally established institutions of procedure and bargaining committees which jointly share responsibility for establishing the rules by which a labour forces behaviour will be controlled through the joint control over jobs.

Collective bargaining not only provides a method for the joint regulation of jobs, as the basis for establishing an orderly pattern which prescribes behaviour, but it does so by accepting that though a difference of interest and a basis of conflict still remains, the effect of bargaining restricts the scope of the difference. Dubin, for example states,

"Collective bargaining provides the means for systematic social change in the working code governing management - men relations. The means for carrying out and resolving industrial conflict become established, limited and defined".¹⁷⁵

It has been claimed by Ross that collective bargaining absorbs the energy of union leaderships, deflecting them away from what might

otherwise be activities which pose more serious challenges to the status quo.¹⁷⁶ Dunlop sees the maturing of collective bargaining reducing the influence of internal political considerations of the union in wage settlements, while Flanders, suggests, that collective bargaining encourages a more "cautious" view among the union leadership of the "continuing relationship within which the parties have to live together".¹⁷⁷ Walton and McKersie mention, that a function of negotiations can be attitudinal change, and even the development of "co-operative relationships",¹⁷⁸ while Hoxie argues, that where unions appear mainly as bargaining institutions they become "trade conscious rather than class conscious".¹⁷⁹

For Dubin the institution of collective bargaining places worker reactions into an institutional form compatible with the position of management. He says,

"It is the workers personalised reactions to industrial disorder that is translated into organisational terms to make the workers reaction to disorder comparable to that of management".¹⁸⁰

Institutionalisation, it is argued by Kuhn, introduces rationality: Procedures of "industrial jurisprudence" replace disorder.

"A system of 'laws' replace the arbitrary decisions of individuals and an orderly approach to reason replaces the disruptive use of force and coercion in disputes."¹⁸¹

Ross maintains that bargaining not only becomes an institution for regulating conflict but it also results in a shift in authority within the bargaining institution. In the trade union, for example, the authority for bargaining moves from the rank and file into the representatives of the union apparatus.¹⁸² This, he argues, not only imbues rational calculation in decisions taken by leaderships but helps stem more spontaneous outbreaks of protest among the rank and

file in the work situation. He states,

"The first contribution of the business union has been to rationalise the conduct of the strike. It has attempted with great success to eliminate the irrational emotional outburst. Anger and resentment are dampened when the moment is inappropriate and accentuated when the time is ripe; emotion is stored up and paid out in the light of cold strategical requirements..... the strike.... is now conducted as an integral part of an effort to advance industrial partnership.... it is... quite dignified, and respectable".¹⁸³

This emasculation of power through the development of collective bargaining institutions, has for some writers become internalised into a moral value. Lester suggests that the "commodity concept" of employment has become replaced by a "welfare concept"¹⁸⁴ of employer-employee relations. Charles's contention is that while the development of collective bargaining in Britain has not been "legally binding", it has been "morally binding" upon the parties concerned,¹⁸⁵ while Fox maintains that the view of industrial relations pluralism is that industrial societies are in a state of an "approximate", basic "procedural consensus". He argues,

"that given 'goodwill' and such external stimulus, help and structural support as may prove necessary, managements and unions will always and everywhere be able ultimately to negotiate comprehensive, codified systems of regulation which provide a fully adequate and orderly context making for the promotion and maintenance of orderly behaviour".¹⁸⁶

This industrial relations pluralist approach to power, with its emphasis upon rule-making and procedural regulation, however, imputes a systems based value upon what comprises orderly behaviour. Consequently what is viewed as 'disorder' is what is considered to be dysfunctional to the operation of an industrial relations system. It is perceived as a threat, in other words, to the formal rationality embodied in the structure of the system itself, or the industrial organisation. Dubin, for instance, defines disorder as,

"Disorder in industry can be defined as the breakdown of an ordered organisational structure and the human relationships that are prescribed by the organisational pattern. Every enterprise has a more or less well-defined structure and a pattern of expected behaviour that govern the actions of each individual contributing his services to the organisation". 187

Flanders and Fox see disorder in British industrial relations as the breakdown of normative regulation, that is a failure in agreed rules to constrain workplace behaviour which results in unpatterned behaviour. They say,

"To the extent that necessary normative regulation is lacking or is weakened and threatened with collapse, disorder becomes manifest in unpatterned behaviour leading to an undermining of integration and predictability in social action and events. In more specific terms disorder emerges as dislocation, disruption and a variety of other symptoms associated with frustrated expectation." 188

Similarly, the Donovan Commission saw 'unofficial' action, as a central 'problem' in workplace relations, being primarily a failure to establish appropriate institutions to regulate behaviour, in changing social and economic conditions.

"Unofficial strikes and other types of unofficial action in industry are above all a symptom of a failure to devise institutions in keeping with changing needs". 189

Industrial relations pluralism, with its focus upon the institutional means to emasculate power conflict in workplace relations, sees orderly relations resulting from institutionally established relations between management and trade union organisations. Collective bargaining appears as the main agency for rule making and remains the principle method for ameliorating power conflicts. This approach not only accepts a legitimate difference of interests and tolerates a right to representation, but, through an institutional framework, it seeks to contain power conflicts to joint agreements arrived at

through decision making of collective bargaining.

A major limitation of the industrial relations pluralist view is that, by confining its analysis largely to the problems of institutional regulation, it focuses mainly upon the mechanism of accommodation in a relationship which is initially acknowledged to be one of power conflict. It therefore presents the study of industrial relations as being, in considerable part, a concern with constraining workplace behaviour. Through collective bargaining, it sees the possibility for joint agreements, within circumstances of mutual organisational dependence, regulating jobs. But rules and negotiated agreements to regulate jobs is not quite the same as the control over the workers and workgroups in these jobs. In this respect industrial relations pluralism shares a common difficulty with other rule determined behaviour perspectives, in that actual life rules are never entirely conformed to.¹⁹⁰ In the work situation, moreover, the position of wage labour, owing to its work capacity not being inseparable from its human capacity, means that wage labour can never be a completely conditioned reflection of institutionally determined rules. Rules, jointly arrived at, or not, by management and trade union representatives, even upon the most favourable grounds for possible mutual acceptance, remain continually subject to frequent reinterpretation due to a variety of considerations. The very existence of rules makes them open to abuse, manipulation, interpretation, partial rejection, as well as a variety of degrees and ways of acceptance. Rules, therefore require to be acted upon, they are, consequently, subject to choices. Conformity, or deviance, from the rules and formal agreements cannot be explained simply, as it is partly tied to the complexities and variegation of human essence. To understand workplace relations, consequently, it is

insufficient just to possess a knowledge of rule making, it also requires a knowledge of the process of deviancy. Therefore the study of workplace relations cannot ignore the reasons, attitudes, motivation, ideologies and interests and actions from the perspective of those in the work situation.¹⁹¹

Undue emphasis upon the process of rule making and imputed system values of 'disorder' detracts attention from the difficulties surrounding rule administration.¹⁹² Furthermore, the over-emphasis upon collective bargaining in the joint creation of rules, tends to undervalue the extent to which the persistence of unilateral forms of power continue to be exercised within the workplace, job control, informality and workgroup authority, and unofficial workplace organisations continue to sustain themselves alongside formal regulation.¹⁹³ In order to effectively constrain these tendencies towards the independent exercise of power in workplace relations, a congruence between behaviour at work and rule making can only be brought about either through worker compliance or by methods of rule enforcement. But even compliance does not necessarily imply full acceptance, or consensus. It can occur out of pragmatic acceptances; be merely a temporary phenomenon in particular circumstances. Rule enforcement on the other hand, implies the withdrawal of inducement or, the use, or threat, of sanctions. The emasculation of power through joint regulation advocated by industrial relations pluralists ultimately must rest upon action. Both compliance to rules or the enforcement of rules, cannot be wholly understood by reference to the establishment of these rules. It requires an analysis of the responses of both management and shop floor workers to the presence of these rules in the daily practice of the issues which confront workplace relations. Such a perspective

not only requires the identification of an issue but must also analyse the dynamics of policy formation, the deployment of strategy, and the processes of the very political judgements, and ideological perspectives operating within both management and union organisations to affect the practice of industrial relations.

Studies of workplace relations provide considerable evidence of the continual tendency for forms of unilateral job control to emerge, often placated by the actions or non actions, of management, where joint rule making has been established. Gouldner, in his study of the 'indulgency pattern',¹⁹⁴ Lupton's analysis of 'the fiddle',¹⁹⁵ in piecework work determination in the textile industry, and Brown, with his account of custom and practice in engineering,¹⁹⁶ or Kahn, with his evaluation of 'frictional bargaining' in the tyre industry,¹⁹⁷ all raise doubts surrounding the extent to which workplace relations can become rigorously formalised through institutions of joint regulation. This approach to workplace relations, while it cannot omit the significance of the effect of institutionalisation, must also take account of the internal processes of conflict and control which pattern behaviour both within management and union organisations, and in the interaction between them. As Mann explains,

"However institutionalised industrial relations become, strikes reveal the workers pent-up feelings deprivation and hostility to the employer" ¹⁹⁸

Industrial relations pluralism, with its emphasis upon emasculating power conflict, over states the processes of accommodation at the expense of understating the extent to which power conflict continually appears in workplace relations. As Hyman states,

".....in every workplace there exists an invisible frontier of control, reducing some of the formal powers of the employer: a frontier which is redefined in a continuous process of pressure overt and tacit struggle....an unceasing power

struggle is therefore a central feature of industrial relations". 199

The question of power is a concept which is central to the understanding of industrial society. In political and sociological theory the question of power has been explored in ways which reveal that the view of power is tied to different ideological perspectives surrounding the nature of society, and the significance of institutions and human agency in determining the exercise of power. In industrial relations, the view that power can be confined to jointly regulated institutions has been explored. In general, power emerges as a possible independent variable, which, though existing within hierarchically defined organisations and subject to the environmental constraints within which organisations operate, remains ultimately an act of human activity. Power does not exist in structures or structural variables but is manifest in human action, which may be constrained by those forces. As the exercise of power cannot prevail independent of the human will, it needs to be explored within how men, in the process of historical development, both influence and shape that development. The exercise of power is consequently an eternally problematical concept which must ultimately be subjected to empirical evaluation.

From this exploration of the study of power three propositions present themselves for empirical investigation. These will form the basic approach to the analysis of redundancy as a key issue in workplace relations, in the British Motor industry.

The investigation is primarily concerned with the affect of power in the process of redundancy - the means by which redundancy decisions become realised, in both policy and practice - has had upon the developments that have taken place in workplace relations. The study, therefore, concentrates particularly upon the efforts of employer attempts to maintain control of managerial prerogatives over redundancy issues, and how the form of this control is influenced by managerial strategies towards workplace organisation. In the course of the analysis three important areas are questioned.

- 1 What has been managerial policy toward redundancy in the British Motor industry? Upon what considerations has the policy been based, and how, and for what reasons, has this policy changed over time? What strategies have been pursued by management in the industry to achieve these policy ends?

The study will seek not only to inquire into policy change but analyse the consequence of these policy changes upon the response of workplace organisation and workplace industrial relations. Consequently it will also consider:

- 2 What has been the response of workplace organisation to the strategies of management over the question of redundancy? How important has the issue of redundancy been for the stability of workplace organisation? Upon what basis have the politics and policies of workplace organisation of redundancy been based? Under what circumstances have workplace organisations been prepared to act independently of their official trade union organisations over the question of redundancy?

Finally, the study will, throughout, consider the more general aspect of the influence management actions can exercise over workplace organisation. It will therefore consider:

- 3 How important has been the question of managerial strategy toward workplace organisation, upon the tendency for workplace organisation to develop and act independently of both trade union leadership and managerial authority? And, how important has been the influence of managerial strategy in the encouragement of workplace organisation to integrate with the institutional arrangements of shared, joint decision-making, over the question of redundancy?

During the post war period, the question of workplace relations and redundancy have appeared as central, though generally separate issues in public policy. 'Full employment' in Britain, in sharp contrast to the mass unemployment of the inter war period, became established as a platform for the provision of both continuity in public economic policy and the basis for a consensus politics which at its peak became known as 'Butskellism'. Until the advent of 'monetarism' and 'Thatcherism', in the mid and later 1970's, 'full employment' in Britain had, since its conception in 1944, retained a high priority in public policy and in the ideas and practices of central economic and financial management. This condition did not arise merely to fulfil party political obligation, but it was also an attempt to meet the increasing aspirations and expectations of the general populace. No more was this the case than in the workplace, where the 'right to work' and 'no redundancy' became slogans which for most of the post war period appeared to have replaced the unemployment and hunger marches of the inter war period. In more recent times, however, a number of developments have taken place which have appeared to have profound affects upon public policy approaches towards both the question of redundancy and that of workplace organisation.

After 1960, in the wake of a number of periodic economic crises the state began to move away from its traditional non-interventionist role in which issues like redundancy and the related topic of manpower were viewed as the exclusive responsibility of industry. This change saw not only the state extending its activities into welfare, retraining, job creation, regional policy etc., but it was

accompanied by a growing concern over developments in industrial relations. Changes in both of these fields led not only to changes in employer attitudes, policies, and managerial strategies in regard to labour recruitment, but it resulted in more specific changes occurring over issues like redundancy and workplace organisation. Governments of all persuasion, moreover, became more concerned about developments in industrial relations. It was primarily the impact of shop floor attitudes which appeared to find expression in a growing organised workplace in which the role of shop steward appeared as a significant figure that eventually led to the setting-up of a Royal Commission on Trade Unions and Employers Associations in 1965.²⁰⁰ Conflict in the workplace had become associated with explanations surrounding the failures in economic policy, the ineffectiveness of incomes policy and the inability to curb wage drift. It was out of a fear of terminal industrial decline that a pressure for change occurred in public policy towards questions of manpower and redundancy and workplace relations.

The growth of redundancy research is clearly a reflection of an apparent disjuncture between the desire for full employment and security at work and a concern for industrial modernisation, structural change and higher productivity with lower manning levels. A study of the affect of redundancy upon action in the workplace is therefore of some importance in an evaluation of public policy. Furthermore, the fear of redundancy to job security appears as a regular aspect of job dependence for wage labour, which considerably affects the 'life chances' for industrial workers. As the propensity of redundancy has increased it has become a more significant aspect of industrial life. Both redundancy and workplace relations are issues within which there exists a considerable difference of interest and both of which have

proven to be sources of conflict. Consequently, both have been defined in public policy as 'problem' questions. But whereas redundancy studies have almost wholly neglected the impact of redundancy upon workplace relations, the growth in the study of workplace industrial relations has not generally been issue orientated.

The main type of workplace research conducted in Britain has been that of large scale empirical investigations, generally based upon the findings of pre-coded questionnaires, which on occasions have been supplemented by interviews. The most important examples of this approach has been the extensive work carried out by the Oxford and Warwick Schools of Industrial Relations.²⁰¹ Though the application of sample survey techniques to workplace organisation has helped to provide a mass of factual information to previously uncharted territory, such research does have limitations. Their conclusions are usually based upon summaries of gross statistical aggregates, while respondents' opinions are based upon an attitude at one moment in time, and often subject to limited choice responses. Though these research techniques have proved a valuable means for estimating the numbers of shop stewards or identify senior stewards or the number of 'full time' convenors, these approaches are not as successful in taking account of the position of the actor in the work situation or to what extent responses may be shaped by the existence of a particular power relationship. On the other hand, participant observation approaches like, for example, the work carried out by Batstone, Boraston, and Frenkel²⁰², and the study of Clack²⁰³, or the insiders account of shop steward organisation undertaken by Beynon,²⁰⁴ have displayed more sensitivity to the interactive basis of workplace relations in the motor industry. Similarly the retrospective account of a strike and its implications published by Friedman

and Meredeen²⁰⁵ of Dagenham, have all provided insights into plant relations, but generally share with the survey approach a largely a-historic perspective. These studies of the car industry have been supplemented in recent years by a virtual growth industry in historical literature published on the early British motor industry. Carr,²⁰⁶ and Zeitlin²⁰⁷ have both produced studies which have in part been based upon the inter war workplace relations in the motor industry in Coventry, while Whiting²⁰⁸ has looked at the development of community and workplace organisation in Oxford during the same period. There has also been a strong historical interest in wartime industrial relations. Kendall,²⁰⁹ Pribicevic²¹⁰, and Hinton²¹¹ have all examined the wartime shop stewards movement which arose during the first world war, while, more recently, Croucher²¹² has provided an account of the experience of workplace organisation in the second world war. These have provided insights into workplace relations in some of the motor industry centres which were turned over to munitions production. Apart from these attempts to periodise, the study of the workplace there has also been a growing number of biographical accounts of the early motor manufacturers. Richardson, for example, devotes a section of his study of Coventry to the early pioneers in the motor industry.²¹³ Lanchester,²¹⁴ Austin,²¹⁵ and Morris,²¹⁶ have all been the subject of biographical works, while in the last few years, Church²¹⁷ has engaged in a series of publications, including that of Austin, from the perspective of the business historian, while Overly²¹⁸ has completed a similar study of the Morris organisation. All these studies necessarily focus upon the early formative period but do not proceed beyond 1945. Graham Turner,²¹⁹ in one of the few accounts of management, has examined the process of merger and takeover in the post war British motor industry, in an account which largely relies upon the insights of the journalist rather than that of the academic. He, however, says little of the industry's attitude

to workplace organisation. All of these histories of the business or management side of the industry have largely neglected labour relations or the employer attitude towards workplace organisation. None have produced a systematic account of how managerial policy attempted to influence the course of workplace relations. In general throughout all these studies, the relationship between the redundancy issue and workplace organisation has been largely ignored in the available literature, or in the case of A Friedman²²⁰ and H A Turner et al,²²¹ although it has been identified as an issue, it has been given only fleeting consideration in their analysis.

The purpose of this study is ^{to} seek to analyse the way in which the recurring issue of redundancy in the British motor industry has affected the development of workplace organisation. The objective is to offer an explanation within an explanatory framework of power relations. In so doing, the intention is not to produce a definitive history of the motor industry, though clearly some historical context will be present, nor a complete knowledge of workplace organisation. Rather, it is hoped to establish the importance of job defence upon the power relations that operate in the workplace. The principle method of investigation consequently, is to be based around the analysis of redundancy conflicts that have arisen in the industry. It is, therefore, largely a study of overt conflict over the question of redundancy and how this kind of conflict shapes or has shaped employer, trade union and workforce attitudes towards workplace organisation. Though such an approach may be criticised for appearing to over-state the level of conflict in industrial relations,²²² for the purpose of a power analysis, ^{it is in} situations of conflict over competing interests that power is, perhaps, most vividly revealed. The study of conflict helps to disclose not only the power structure and how it operates, but also discloses the interactive bases of power.

Conflict situations, furthermore, not only help to clarify positions but help toward overcoming the frequent disjuncture between policy and practice, the beliefs held by parties and their actions. In conflict situations, slogans, rhetoric and speeches must confront concrete reality expressed in action. What is of interest is not just what is being claimed should happen but what actually does happen. The study of a conflict situation enables the analysis of why certain choices are made and acted upon and what kinds of explanations can be put forward to account for inactivity when a conflict of interest is at stake, but fails to become manifest.

In regard to workplace organisation the central concern is to offer accounts of the effect redundancy has had upon the power and influence of workplace organisation. It will seek to analyse the internal basis of power and authority which is exercised by shop steward organisation over its membership and constituent unions in the workplace, but will also seek to determine how such organisations have attempted to exercise policy and action which are dependent or independent of the power of employers and national union officials. In particular, the study will also try to account both for the development of interplant combine committees, both within a single organisation and between differing organisations across the motor industry ; how such organisations have defined their policy issues, with what strategies and with what kinds of success have they had in being able to realise their goals.

The research perspective, however, will seek to go beyond the confines found for example in conventional sociological approaches which have governed the analysis of structure and action.²²³ It will largely follow a social action perspective insofar as it lays

stress upon identifying the selection of means for obtaining ends, and will therefore attempt to provide an account of why certain courses of action were pursued while others were ignored or were opposed to. It therefore will be concerned with the study of the actors as expressions of conscious rational strategy which becomes articulated in decision making and action by the workplace organisation. The research strategy however will seek to avoid the tendency towards psychological reductionism inherent in some schools of social action.²²⁴ Consequently the method of analysis will also seek to go beyond the merely actor orientated²²⁵ view and seek to identify the actions of workplace organisation within an interactive framework which involves both the power and authority of management, union officials and on occasions, the State. This account of workplace organisation, in other words, seeks to take account of the particular set of circumstances which define the situation within which action occurs but also how strategies and goals arise within an overall framework of structure variables and institutional influences which may have a bearing upon the choices and strategies in a power relationship. The analysis therefore cannot be based upon the interests of any single party but rather from a totality of interaction between the principle parties in an issue of power conflict. In other words, this approach seeks to account for how institutional influences and structural variables act to shape the range of choices available to those in the workplace situation, and how interested parties at workplace level seek to challenge, redefine or act upon these forces. The study, consequently, will, throughout, place considerable emphasis upon the influence of product markets, the effect of competition and fiscal and economic policy upon the discretionary activity and strategies enacted at workplace level. The analysis will also attempt to account for the influence of institutional pressures

operating externally to the workplace situation, particularly the attitude of the State, the policies of the Engineering Employers Federation and the positions adopted by union conferences in addition to the actions of full-time union officials who all interact between works management, the workforce and the workplace organisation in such a way^{as} to disclose the nature of the power relationship.

The object of the study is to comprehend the variety of interests which are revealed in a question of redundancy in the workplace. It seeks to establish the limits, determinants and autonomy which operate within and upon workplace organisation in a struggle for power over a key issue. The primary concern is to establish how, in particular historical moments, workplace organisations have developed in the particular ways in which they have and how it is that they function as they do. Central to this approach lies an examination of what accounts for the strength and weaknesses of workplace organisation, and to what extent institutional inter union conflicts, political divisions, skilled categories, and sectional interests act, to strengthen or weaken the basis of collective activity organised at workplace level. What in other words are the inherent strengths and weaknesses for workplace organisation in a period of redundancy and recession?

The study is essentially based upon an empirical investigation of how redundancy and workplace organisation have developed in the motor industry. The approach adopted towards the search for source material has been one of seeking to gain access to the widest possible available material from the State, the employers, trade unions and workplace organisations. Where access was not permitted, or where time prevents

a more thorough examination, a greater reliance has been placed upon secondary source material. A full bibliography of primary sources is available at the end of the text, but it is perhaps sufficient to make a few comments on the nature of the sources and how these have shaped the substantial part of the study. The most important source material on redundancy policy and the grievances which arose surrounding redundancy, for example, when they were put into the Procedure for Avoiding Disputes-were obtained from the EEF. Full access was granted for source material up to 1965. At local level the EEA at Coventry provided access to documents and reports which covered mainly the 1940's, the early 1950's and selected material in the 1960's. No material was used from the Birmingham and Wolverhampton EEA; however, certain relevant correspondents and reports were available in the records at Broadway House.

In regard to trade union sources at National level, access was granted by the TGWU to their GEC minutes for the whole period up to 1970. The AEU EC, however, provided only access to their half-yearly reports and the unions monthly journal at Peckham, though some NC conference reports were available. The NUVB EC minutes for the period 1945 until 1966 and some of the records of the CSEU were the other main sources for material used in the study. The NUVB minutes were at Transport House in London while the CSEU records were from the deposit in the Modern Records Centre at Warwick University. At local level, the most comprehensive trade union records were provided by the Coventry AEU DC minutes, the NUVB BC, and the SMW BC minutes. These were available for most of the post war period. The inter war period, however, has relied mostly upon the AEU DO's monthly reports. From Oxford the only union material came from the AEU DC records, while in Birmingham the AEU were the only local minutes available

and these were only selections which appeared in the Dick Etheridge Papers.

At workplace level, the two most important finds were the Les Gurl papers and the Dick Etheridge papers which the author arranged for deposit at the Modern Records Centre at Warwick University. Both provide valuable information on the history of the BMC combine committee, while the Etheridge collection contains considerable material on workplace relations at the Austin works in Longbridge, including shop steward minutes and correspondence. Data and strikes, redundancy, manpower and unemployment was obtained centrally from the Department of Employment at Watford and Central London, and locally from the Regional office in Birmingham and the local office in Coventry. Documentary sources, particularly covering the second world war period, were acquired from the Public Record Office at Kew. The study has also relied upon a wide variety of national, local and workplace newspapers, while the data for wage rates came from the minutes of the Coventry Toolroom Agreement which covered the period 1942-1969. Documentary sources, however, have been supplemented by a series of interviews with prominent senior stewards in the motor industry, a list of which appears at the end.

The study proceeds in Part 2 and 3 with an examination of the development of the early motor industry up to 1939. Part 2 seeks to emphasise the distinctive technological character and geographical location of the industry and its general separation from the main locations of the established engineering trade union traditions in Britain. In Part 3, the inter war labour market and the workplace managerial philosophies of Austin and Morris are explored in relation to the weak position of organised labour and the particular nature of

workplace conflict in conditions of irregular employment. The weaknesses of union organisations, the virtual absence of a shop floor organisation, in a period when the industry is undergoing a substantial transformation, are explored in terms of the particular character of power conflict at the point of production.

Part 4 deals somewhat briefly with the wartime experience, when the motor industry is used for the production of munitions. Under the influence of the State in industrial relations[&] workplace organisation, union memberships rapidly expand in conditions of co-operation and commitment by the emerging workplace organisation, despite the reluctance on the part of the employers. This experience establishes the role of a constitutionally based shop stewards movement which becomes increasingly involved with the joint management of production questions. It is towards the end of the war period that sees the extension of this involvement into the administration of redundancy. Part 5 examines the power struggles in the early post war period when employers seek to regain their traditional authority over the workplace, while the workplace organisation attempts to defend their acquired positions in industry in generally favourable trading conditions. Part 6 examines the increasing tendency for managements in the industry to dismiss shop stewards through redundancy and how an atomised workforce responds to such a challenge. In part 7 the study examines the emergence of the struggle for the control over redundancy as being a critical question in the defence of workplace organisation. The section examines the transformations of isolated workplace opposition and the absence of a unified trade union leadership and policy with the attempts to create a unified workplace organisation both within firms and across the industry. It is from within such a development that the influence of the

political workplace leadership of the combine committees seek to overcome the problem of unity and the question of redundancy. Part 8 deals with how, out of two major confrontations in 1956 over the question of redundancy and the fear of automation, the influence of the combine committees and the changing balance of power among the national union leaderships sees a rapid growth in union membership and workplace conflict. This part analyses the transformation in managerial strategy towards workplace organisation in a period of rising workplace conflict and recession.

The study concludes with an attempt to locate its principle findings within a contemporary debate about workplace organisation and calls for more focus to be placed upon the construction of models of industrial relations in which the concept of power becomes a more central consideration.

PART 2

THE BRITISH MOTOR INDUSTRY AND
WAGE LABOUR IN THE FORMATIVE PERIOD

Abstract

Part two provides a brief introduction to the emergence of the motor industry in Britain. It emphasises the distinctiveness of the industry, not just in terms of pioneering new technologies, pay systems, and work methods, but also in its application of the interchangeable principle of mass assembly, through which the industry developed, largely outside the established structure, organisation, and manufacturing methods, upon which British engineering had been established, and from which the Engineering Employers Federation based their policy for workplace control. This account suggests that the particular multitude of small, heterogeneous manufacturing concerns, which formed the industrial infra-structure of the West Midlands, were not only geographically isolated from the indigenous centres of the craft traditions in engineering, but that the formation of the motor industry in districts possessing a strong pre-industrial heritage, where labour relations policies were characterised by traditions of employer paternalism and labour collaboration, gave way, with the rapid growth of large plants, to mass trade unionism. It was largely the presence of the motor industry, with its utilisation of its work methods, during the first world war, which began the transformation in the collective power of wage labour in the region.

The origin of the British car industry lay outside the prevailing traditions of British engineering. The ownership and organisation of the industry, the form of technology, the location of assembly plants and the use of component supplies were at variance with the established character of 19th Century engineering which had been based around capital goods and heavy machine tools. The motor industry emerged as the outcome of a British application to, initially, European inventions and the adoption of American technology.

The Engineering Tradition

Few of the British pioneers in the motor industry were drawn from the engineering industry. Government producers excepted, no sector of established engineering was attracted to the production of cars.¹ The industry arose out of a series of manufacturing techniques associated with products which were alien to British manufacturing.² The Midlands, where the main parts of the motor industry became based, had far from completely been transformed by the first phase of the industrial revolution. Unlike Glasgow, Newcastle, Liverpool, Manchester, Bristol or London, it did not possess ready access to sea transportation. Despite a canal network, the Midlands largely had to await the railways, and later the combustion engine itself, to overcome its geographical disadvantages.³ Its industry was organised into a multitude of small independent producers in the brass, screw, nut and bolt, tube, and iron and steel trades.⁴ These industries could relatively easily adapt to the manufacture of standardised parts upon a mass basis.⁵

Nineteenth Century engineering, had been built around the manufacture of textile machinery, steam engines, locomotives, ship building and marine engineering, as well as heavy and general engineering products.⁶ It had consisted of considerable numbers of small firms engaged in the production of a wide range of designs for individual products.⁷ The very heterogeneity of the export market for capital goods and the highly differentiated features associated with small firm manufacture, discouraged movements towards more homogeneous forms of design and manufacturing techniques.⁸ Many of these firms produced their own machine tools, as well as spares and replacements when required.⁹ Consequently there was little opportunity for large batch production and economies of scale in manufacture. The emphasis was upon individual products and technical perfection, there was a general absence in the production for stock or a spares market. As a result, large sections of British engineering were particularly slow and ill placed to move towards standardisation in products and specialisation in manufacturing methods.¹⁰ This encouraged a conservatism in manufacture and a resistance towards innovation, which reinforced a dependence upon the craft tradition and the all round abilities of a highly skilled workforce.¹¹

The New Industries

The motor industry grew from a different engineering tradition to that found in heavy or general engineering. It originated from the technologies of the new industries developed after the 1880s and owed much to American influence.¹² Specialisation was increasingly to be part of the process of production rather than just a feature of the actual product.¹³ Through a technological convergence resulting in the application of similar methods of production, a mass production industry arose based upon the

manufacture of interchangeable parts. This enabled a considerable degree of specialisation and repetition to take place in the production of parts for later assembly. The production of small arms, sewing machines, bicycles, and later, motor vehicles and aero engines all emerged, applying engineering principles largely divorced from the dominant engineering tradition.¹⁴

Under the umbrella of large government contracts for small arms, sufficient market security was created to encourage the Birmingham Small Arms Company to invest in light and medium weight specialist machine tools for the production of rifles on the interchangeable principle.¹⁵ Small arms manufacture was at the forefront of new methods.¹⁶ Improvements in strength, lightness and resilience of steel, improved accuracy and reliability in components and expanded the machine tool industry.¹⁷ The manufacture of specialist machines capable of being applied to a relatively small number of precise operations in turning, boring, drilling, milling, planning, grinding and polishing, reduced the skills required of operators. Stratas of semi skilled labour were employed, skilled in limited repetitive operations. A workforce emerged, largely isolated from the craft customs of traditional areas of engineering. The cycle boom of the 1880s and early 1890s attracted large amounts of capital, resulted in heavy investment in modern machine tools and enlisted the widespread use of cheap, unskilled labour.¹⁸ The highly competitive nature of the industry, and the seasonal demand for cycles, created a sharpness in enterprise which facilitated the adoption of modern techniques, the employment of female labour and the extensive practice of pieceworking and shift work.¹⁹

The expansion of the machine tool industry in the West Midlands contrasted with the more traditional engineering regions. Based in large firms, adopting American methods, producing for a market rather than individual customer preferences, it emerged as the distiller of new methods to light engineering and component manufacturers.²⁰ The cycle boom increased demand for specialist machine tools.²¹ The conglomeration of small firms in the West Midlands quickly adjusted to the production of cycle components.²² Independent producers specialising in springs, hubs, chains, saddles, frames etc., created an infrastructure of interdependent firms who individually were able to pursue technical and production refinements for each component, in addition to spreading the liability of risk capital, likely to be involved in the production of all components in the assembly of the completed cycle.

The cycle industry created the embryo of the future motor industry : the assembly of bought-in parts produced by specialist component manufacturers on the interchangeable principle.²³ Manufacturers of sewing machines and small arms began to manufacture and assemble cycles. The ease of entering the market and the promise of high profits attracted new manufacturers with commercial rather than engineering backgrounds.²⁴ The collapse of the cycle boom, the large number of contraptions, and the seasonal basis of demand for cycles were the underlying causes of unemployment and worker insecurity.²⁵ The more successful cycle manufacturers sought other industrial outlets to offset the volatile market for cycles. The majority of them moved into the production of cars, the development of which coincided with the saturation of the cycle market.²⁶

The Early Motor Industry

The early development of the combustion engine took place in Germany and France.²⁷ The first car made in Britain was German, the Daimler, built under licence.²⁸ F W Lanchester and Herbert Austin are credited as being the earliest British pioneers of the motor industry, producing their first cars in 1896.²⁹ During the experimental stage up to 1913, over 198 makes of car appeared, more than half of which quickly went out of existence.³⁰ The industry nevertheless had become the fastest growing sector of the British economy with 65 firms being engaged in car production between 1907 and 1912.³¹ By 1913 nearly 100,000 workers were being employed, while the leading companies were amongst the largest employers of labour.³² Many of the more successful manufactuerers had previously been cycle makers, but a considerable number of firms entered the industry without previous manufacturing or engineering experience.³³

The early pioneers and inventors were drawn from wide and diverse backgrounds including scientists, mechanics, civil engineers. Only two engineering firms took an interest in the early car industry and significantly both of these were in the armaments industry, Vickers Maxim having a holding in Wolsely, and Armstrong Whitworths held an interest in Armstrong-Siddeley. Both were attracted by potential contracts for military vehicles.³⁴ B S A eventually added Daimler to its small arms trade.³⁵ The industry invested heavily in modern machine tools towards 1914 and progressively distanced itself from the rest of British industry by its adoption of modern methods of manufacture.³⁶ Despite these advances the British industry remained behind the progress in the United States.

Before the McKenna Duties introduced in 1915, restricting car

imports, British cars were even struggling to compete in the domestic market.³⁷

Despite a commitment to high investment and new technology among the leading firms, the proliferation in models, the limited market, and emphasis upon individuality, particularly in coachwork, restricted the movement towards batch production.³⁸ While the cycle industry had provided the base for the formation of a components industry, with the exception of major items like radiators, carburettors, wheels, and engines, car makers were having to produce a considerable number of their own components.³⁹ As a result the cars tended to be expensive, less able to take advantage in economies of scale and still relied upon large amounts of hand finishing despite the use of machine tools.⁴⁰ At Wolsely and Sunbeam, where the most modern methods were established prior to the first world war, specialisation in labour skills was beginning to become refined.⁴¹ The employment of labour in gangs, with each member becoming skilled in a particular limited task, reduced the dependence upon craft labour and prompted the use of semi-skilled labour.⁴² At Austin the shortage of skilled labour on the rural site at Longbridge was both a spur to utilising new labour saving machinery and to the extensive use of semi-skilled labour.⁴³

During the three years before the first world war, the leading car makers were emerging from the period when the mechanic as opposed to the engineer had the decisive say in production matters.⁴⁴ The emphasis upon excessive technical perfection and individuality in manufacture was becoming increasingly uneconomic. A movement towards small batch production enabled a degree of planning in

design and production. Materials could be ordered in advance, parts produced for stock. Series output, replacing tailored manufacture, enabled more repetition in working methods.⁴⁵ The advanced sections of the industry stood at the brink of the yearly model, the pre-conditions for planned production.⁴⁶ The emphasis was moving towards the organisation of manufacture. Standardisation and the use of specialist machine tools following high investment, facilitated the recruitment of semi-skilled labour and reduced a dependence upon a short supply of skilled workers.⁴⁷

The experience of the war period when private car assembly halted, with the car makers being transformed into producers of munitions, dramatically expanded production capacity and compelled a change in factory organisation.⁴⁸ The volume of orders placed for shells, guns, aeroplane engines, military vehicles and other equipment required the maximum utilisation of plant and machinery, focused attention upon working methods, and required high levels of accuracy and quality in standardised parts.⁴⁹ The outcome of these changes enabled the industry to reduce its dependence upon craft workers by enlisting the wholesale employment of lesser skilled workers, of whom a considerable proportion were women. The knowledge gained through war production prepared the industry for inter-war reorganisation for volume production based upon flow and mass production techniques.⁵⁰

In 1919, the beginnings of a post-war boom hit the car industry. Car manufacturers adjusted back to production for the private market. The pent up demand for vehicles, owing to the abandonment of car manufacture during the war, attracted 40 new producers to

the industry.⁵¹ Between 1921 and 1925 an additional 46 car makers entered into production.⁵² Output in the motor industry continued to increase throughout the 1920s and 1930s. The industry was not hit by the same degree of severity of world recession, unlike many of the staple sectors of the domestic economy or foreign car companies.⁵³ While car production grew, competition among producers intensified. A sharp decline in car prices focused attention upon methods of manufacture.⁵⁴ The control of the industry changed away from a large number of small, or medium, independent producers towards a small number of large multi plant organisations. In 1920 89 firms were manufacturing cars but in 1938 this was down to 33.⁵⁵ Three quarters of all domestic production in 1929 was produced by Morris, Austin and Singer. By 1939, 90% of the market lay in the hands of the 'Big Six' companies.⁵⁶ Four of the six were British owned; Morris, Austin, Standard, and Rootes, The remaining two, Ford and Vauxhall, were American controlled. Four fifths of the remaining 10% of the market lay in the hands of Rover, Singer, B S A and Jaguar.⁵⁷ Two important British Empires formed in the industry during the inter war period. Morris acquired Hollick and Pratt, Osberton Radiators, Wolsely Motors, S U Carburettor, and Riley.⁵⁸ He had a large financial stake in Pressed Steel, the body making plant.⁵⁹ The Morris organisation, accumulating during the 1920s, was followed in the 1930s by the growth of Rootes. This became established through the acquisition of Humber, Hillman, Clement-Talbot, Sunbeam, and British Light Steel Pressings.⁶⁰ Although the West Midlands remained the home of the industry expansion took place in Oxford in the 1920s, and in London with the opening of the Ford Plant at Dagenham in 1932. Vauxhall expanded in Luton in 1931.⁶¹

The concentration of the industry, the high levels of investment and the severe competition and price cutting, placed a premium upon the organisation of work. Emphasis, arising from a war time experience of mass production, was moving towards the organisation of manufacture. The logic of an assembly line was superceding the engineering tradition of workers being divided up into shops based upon particular trades.⁶² The use of metal materials replacing wood in coach work, began to free the industry from a dependence upon coach builders' traditional methods and skills.⁶³ Pressed steel frames and bodies transformed sheet metal working skills. The war time development of employing highly skilled operators to work in toolrooms and on operations for setting jigs, fixtures and specialised machine tools, continued.⁶⁴

For the leading firms the late 1920s and 1930s became the era of the production engineer, as mass production and flow production techniques merged with capital investment in technology and factory organisation.⁶⁵ Detailed production programmes were devised to extract the optimum utilisation of new machinery for semi-skilled labour.⁶⁶ Investment in high technology, combined with a detailed division of repetitive work tasks, became the basis for factory reorganisation.⁶⁷ The spread of specialisation in working methods and standardisation in product design were the means for reducing production costs and cutting price. In difficult trading periods reduction in wage rates were not uncommon sources of economy.

During the inter war period, the British motor industry increasingly adopted the features of American methods, though without the same level of success.⁶⁸ Morris, perhaps the most successful of the

British owned firms, changed from being essentially an assembler of other manufacturers components into a major component manufacturer within his own right.⁶⁹ He saw economy not so much in saving, but in expenditure on new models, modern equipment, and rigorous planning of production. His knowledge of the cycle industry component suppliers, and experience in assembly of mine sinkers for the admiralty, plus visits to American car plants convinced him of the affect of reduced costs if the car assembler insisted upon modern production methods, not just in his own plant but in component supplies who undertook his contracts.⁷⁰ In 1923, over 200 firms were directly linked to Morris production under the special relationship whereby Morris personally dictated quality, materials and working methods. Where, as with the Hotchkiss engine plant in Coventry, the company refused to comply with Morris methods, he bought them out, renamed the factory Morris Engines and replanned the factory along his own lines.⁷¹ The plant became a pioneer of flow line production and modern machine methods, a model of American production technology in Britain.⁷² The building of the Pressed Steel Works in Oxford further demonstrated Morris's willingness to involve high risk capital in the pursuit of modern technology for the purpose of mass production and reduced costs. The organisation grew from 2 firms in 1919, to 10 separate businesses and 2 subsidiaries by 1930.⁷³

As car industry empires became established, employment in the industry and the size of plants grew. A larger proportion of the market fell into fewer hands. This domination in the assembly of cars for volume production, promoted high levels of investment in flow line techniques of mass production. It initiated an intensity of repetition in working methods, a finer division of labour, and a

reduction in the proportion of craft workers employed. This tendency towards centralisation and domination in the industry encouraged the employment in the modern plants of large numbers of workers who were increasingly semi-skilled and non-unionised. These developments in motor manufacturing provided opportunities for the mass recruitment of workforces into trade unions and a source for the establishment of organised trade union power in the industry. Mass production technology, however, also provided the employer with more choice for the location of the new mass assembly plants. Of the American companies in Britain, Ford moved from Manchester to Dagenham in 1932, while General Motors became the largest single employer in Luton. Wolverhampton declined as^a centre for car production. The main British companies, Austin, Morris, Rootes, in addition to some of the more important smaller concerns, Standard, Armstrong-Siddeley, Jaguar, Rover, Alvis, Riley, and Daimler, centred around Coventry, Birmingham, and Oxford. These districts were not only without nineteenth century experiences of large scale factory employment, but until the development of the motor car, they were also areas without significant historical ties with trade unionism.

These rapid changes, in an industry prone to intense competition in the product market, and subject to considerable financial insecurity resulting in investment being largely internally generated, were forces which not only reinforced a managerial intention to exclusively exercise power and authority in its own workplace, but combined with an economy of mass unemployment, and in an industry of seasonal working, provided an opportunity for labour relations policies, hostile to workplace trade unionism. In the formative period of rapid industrial change, an employer strategy in labour relations

based upon employer paternalism and the prospect of high individual earnings, through the exhaustion of pieceworking, resulted in the exercise of power in the workplace being expressed through a series of crisis based challenges to the exercise of managerial control. Job dependence for the car worker, in conditions of severe job insecurity, saw the exercise of shop floor power being expressed both in independence of management authority and removed from the organisational influence of union organisations. The pattern of worker insecurity in the labour market combined with employer opposition and wage policies, discouraged the developments in workplace organisation among the growing numbers of semi-skilled workers until after 1934, but it did not remove conflict from the workplace.

Under the 1898 'Terms of Settlement' the Federated Engineering Employers formally rejected the traditional control of craft trade unionism in the workplace. The Employers

"would admit no interference with the management of their business, and reserve to themselves the right to introduce into any federated workshop, at the option of the employer concerned, any condition of labour under which any member of the trade unions.... were working at the commencement of the dispute".⁷⁴

They reserved the right to employ non union labour, extend piecework to all member firms and their employees regardless of union applications, present guidelines for the operation of overtime working and state the right to set wage rates that were mutually acceptable to their members. The employers claimed discretion in the training and selection of employees and the removal of limits over apprentices. The 'terms' were a statement of managerial rights to control their own establishments in contradiction to the craft ethics of unilateral worker control in the workplace.

Disagreements arising in the workplace were to be dealt with in a procedure for the grievance of disputes. This granted a means of trade union recognition whereby shop floor grievances could be taken up by local trade union officials and representatives of

employers associations, trade union recognition and bargaining rights being the basis for a resolution of issues, pending which, no stoppage of work was to take place.⁷⁵ In 1914, the York Memorandum provided that settlements should, as far as possible, take place in the works between the management and the worker directly concerned.

In the event of a failure to settle management would

"accept deputations of workmen who may be accompanied by their organising district delegate".⁷⁶

Before the Shop Stewards and Works Committees agreements of 1917 and 1919, no official role was allocated to shop stewards in the conduct of industrial relations, other than the rather vague references to "deputations of workmen". The operation of the provisions for avoiding disputes was essentially a procedure endorsing the recognition of local and national trade union officials in grievance settlement and collective bargaining, in return for an undertaking not to resort to industrial action.

During the first World War, however, the Ministry of Munitions in an attempt to gain workshop co-operation in a speedy application of dilution, recommended employers to request the appointment of a deputation of workmen, who together with their local trade union representatives, if so required, could meet with management and be informed of changes to be introduced. While the details of these recommendations provided for an element of consultation, it offered no clarity surrounding the role of Shop Committees or Shop Stewards.⁷⁷ In instances, special clauses were written into dilution schemes which made reference to "Shop Committees of Workers"⁷⁸ but in the main, shop steward organisation was not identified nor the activities of stewards mentioned, despite their increasing presence and involvement in workplace affairs. De facto rights were gained for stewards, but without specified rights, the limits and scope of recognition remained undefined. A lack of uniformity across engineering prevailed in the workplace, while disputes arose where shop stewards claimed responsibility and rights beyond those conceded by employers.⁷⁹

In Coventry, in 1917, the question of shop steward recognition became the focal point of a strike. As a result the trade unions and employers undertook to consider the whole question of shop steward recognition on a national basis.⁸⁰ The A S E and two smaller unions refused to sign the agreement on grounds that recognition remained inadequate. In May 1919, a Shop Stewards agreement was eventually signed which became incorporated into the 1922 Managerial Functions Agreements. This provided for recognition of shop stewards and the creation of works committees within the provision for avoiding disputes.⁸¹

These agreements replaced the ad hoc method which had developed before the war and which in some instances had been considerably, though unevenly, developed by shop stewards and their committees between 1914 and 1918. The agreements, aiming at uniformity were providing rights of recognition for stewards within the procedure, but did so upon a more restrictive basis than had been gained through the largely unclear ad hoc developments. The Members of a union who were party to the agreements were entitled to elect shop stewards, and the trade union organisation would officially inform the local management. A Works Committee could be formed comprising of seven management representatives, and seven shop stewards directly elected from the shop floor. It had powers to coopt other stewards where issues from an unrepresented department were in question. A worker with a grievance, which he failed to resolve directly with his foreman, could have his case taken up by a shop steward. This provided the steward with a legitimate position within the industrial relations framework of the firm, while the union issuing his credentials ascribed his acceptance within union rules and policy making.⁸²

Recognition of shop stewards clarified their role, but confined their activity within agreed institutional limits determined by both employers and trade union leaders. It effectively sought to prescribe the power of the independent self governing body, which had operated outside formally fixed limits during the first world war, where legitimacy came from the shop floor and where acceptance arose from an appreciation of their influence among shop floor workers. Recognition enhancing the role of the shop steward in the institutional arrangements of industrial relations, curtailed the acceptance of his independent forms of organisation. The Works Committee were joint management-union bodies with shop steward representation restricted to seven members. There was no role for the shop committees or for senior and leading stewards of individual unions who did not become elected to the Works Committees.⁸³ There was no position for convenor or Joint Shop Stewards Committee. A shop stewards movement, formed through links between workshop committees, would continue to remain outside the channels of collective bargaining relationships with management and beyond the rule books of trade union organisation.

The extension of institutional arrangements between 1898 and 1922 in the Procedure for avoiding disputes in the engineering industry, to involve shop stewards in the settlement of workplace issues, had partly been designed to avoid conflict in the workplace but also to contain the growing position of power which the war time shop stewards movement in engineering had acquired. In particular, its capacity to act independently of the influence of Government, Unions, and Employers. During the inter war period, however, the conditions upon which organised workplace power had been established largely disintegrated, due to the general weakness of wage labour in a period of high

unemployment. Furthermore, the growing opposition of employers to trade unionism, and more especially the important national defeats of trade union organisations in conflicts with employers, led through the exercise of management policies in the workplace to a steep decline in workplace representation. Although the use of institutional arrangements to control workplace power declined, the basis of the antagonism between employer and worker interests did not diminish. In the growing motor industry, power conflict within the interdependence of employer and worker relationships developed outside a framework of institutional constraints.

Trade Union organisation in the motor industry grew out of the conditions associated with the fairly rapid development of modern industry in the West Midlands after 1880. In the expansion of the new industries in this region, the form of technology, rather than the all-round skills of the craftsmen, gave engineering labour its distinctive appearance. By the 1920s, following the experience of war productions, it was the combined application of technology and production management within a sharply competitive product market, which gave shape to the labour relations strategies adopted by the motor industry employers. The organisation of labour, consequently, owed less to the predominance of a craft tradition than was perhaps the case in regions of earlier industrialisation. Workplace relations emerged as much as a response to overt managerial control, presupposed by the adoption of largely American production methods, than to the independence of worker power associated with the craft tradition. A permanency in workplace organisation remained severely impaired by seasonal employment and recurring redundancy in the labour market. Until the advent of the second world war, organisations in the workplace tended to be spontaneous rather than continuous, involving non-unionists as much as trade unionists. Among the mass car producers, the shop floor, with a few notable exceptions, was less tied to the preservation of a craft tradition than with the problem of exacting representation in an industry whose growth involved considerable increases in the intensity of labour, without effectively creating stability of employment or earnings.

The rapid spread of trade unionism among lesser skilled workers before 1914 had signalled the end of an era of trade unionism almost wholly dominated by skilled workers.⁸⁴ General unions sprang up which, nominally at least, aspired to organise the mass of workers whose potential for creating an organised scarcity was considerably more restricted than their skilled counterparts.⁸⁵ These so-called 'new unions' necessarily had to develop a more open policy to organise wholesale among a constant glut of surplus labour which, if left unorganised, continuously threatened to undermine even minimum standards established where unionisation formed.⁸⁶ Given the market conditions for the labour they sought to organise, and the initial socialist objectives of many of their founders, new unionism introduced different methods of trade unionism to hitherto largely unrepresentative labour. These features were, in the main, outside the experiences of the established traditions of the craft societies.

A rapid revival in trade during the 1880s, was followed by a number of spectacular strikes, among which, the most prominent were the Match Girls strike of 1888 and the London Dock strike of 1889. These events heralded the movement of mass organisation among sections of unskilled workers.⁸⁷ Union militancy was expressed in the conception of a 'fighting union' geared to improvements through industrial action with less reliance upon being a benefits organisation.⁸⁸ Popularly presented as class unionism, they opposed the sectionalism which typified the craft societies.⁸⁹ They organised upon industrial lines, while some attempted to develop general labour unions to embrace all classes of labour regardless of skill.⁹⁰ Work groups not possessing a premium upon skill, were easily replaceable

from the ranks of the unskilled. Trade Unions not only aspired to organise locally but also nationally.⁹¹ They had frequent recourse to picketing, pressure used for closed shops and opposition to the use of 'black leg' labour. Public confrontation with unorganised workers and the police, was more clearly identified with the emergence of new unionism than had been the case with the craft unions.⁹²

Many of these early confrontations gave way to more modest objectives because seasonal employment, unemployment, employer opposition and the pressure to preserve and maintain a stable continuous organisation during depressions in trade, gave way to the needs of organisational survival.⁹³ Sharp fluctuations in membership over relatively short periods became a distinguishing feature in the early development of new unionism.

The expansion of the light engineering industries across the West Midlands, based upon repetitive production techniques and the utilisation of modern specialist machine tools, provided a relatively regular source of factory employment requiring only short periods of training. The defeat of the A S E in 1897 and the spread of these modern techniques, which could be operated by semi skilled rather than craft labour, encouraged sections of the A S E leadership to promote trade union organisation among lesser skilled workers.⁹⁴

Industrialisation of the West Midlands grew in areas where trade unionism was particularly weak. The establishment of pieceworking invariably pre dated trade unionism.⁹⁵ The very structure of industry, with its plethora of trades and small scale manufacturers in

Birmingham and the Black Country, discouraged unionisation among workers. The multitude of small workshops, the extensive home working and sub contracting in a wide variety of manufacturers, prevented clear distinctions between employer and employee during the mid-Victorian period. An historian of the period, S Timmiss could write of Birmingham:

"In no town in England is comfort more common, or wealth more equally diffused. If millionaires are few, absolute poverty and weakness are also rare".⁹⁶

This structure of small scale industrial ownership and extensive division of occupations reduced the full effect of trade depressions upon owners and workforces. In 1872 T Baker informed the British Medical Associations,

"The trades of the town are numerous and the subdivision of labour are unusually great; hence fluctuations in commerce rarely falls heavily upon the entire class of artisans and famine is of a very rare occurrence".⁹⁷

A skilled artisan in late Victorian Birmingham could set up as a Master.⁹⁸ This absence of a wide social gulf within industry was reinforced by employer paternalism and worker co-operation. The distinctive political character of local government was strongly tied to the identity of local industry. In politics as in industry, class co-operation became fused with non-conformist values of self help, perseverance, and independence. Quakers and Unitarians held positions of prominence in both business and local government.⁹⁹ This character of industrial and political independence rose to confront the national domination of northern industrialists over economic policy, towards the end of the 19th century. The Manchester School of Free Trade became challenged by the Midland desire for trade protection and tariff reform.¹⁰⁰

The early labour movement in Birmingham was not immune either from these social and political forces, or the structure of the City's industry. In 1884, eighteen years after the formation of the Birmingham Trades Council, its affiliated membership comprised a mass of trade organisations, each with small memberships. The Annual Report reveals a paid-up membership of 3,387 drawn from 22 organisations. These included, Bakers, Bone and Ivory workers, Boot Finishers, Brush Makers, Coach and Iron Workers, Electric Platers, Glass Cutters, Glass Makers, Home Painters, Iron Plate Workers, Lithographic Machine Toolmakers, Nail Cutters, Packing Case Makers, Plumbers, Printers, Railway Servants, Scale Makers, Saddlers, Tailors, Wire Weavers, Coopers, and Tin Plate Workers. The Tin Plate Workers were the largest affiliated union, with only 360 members.¹⁰¹

Industrialisation in the West Midlands increased the number of trades and their organisations. By 1889, 34 trade unions had affiliated to the Trades Council, two years later this had leapt to 52. A general revival in trade and the expansion of manufacturing industries, were factors accounting for the potential of trade union organisation. Despite the City's period of prosperity, the policies of the labour movement were characteristically cautious and collaborative with the small scale employers. The Trade Council Annual Report for 1889 recognises the value of trade unionism but encourages the membership not to make high wage demands.

"While careful to avoid premature or unreasonable demands for increased wages, so thereby to hinder the revival of trade, it is right and just that wages should be raised with the greater prosperity which is now experienced. This can only be sufficiently achieved by combination among workmen themselves: and in this respect trade unionism has proved itself to be the most effective means." ¹⁰²

But the weaknesses of organised labour in Birmingham were also acknowledged.

"Its work is only hindered by the holding aloof of large numbers of artisans, who persistently isolate themselves from their fellows, and thereby weaken the position and hinder the progress of themselves and all others employed in their respective trades". 103

During the last decade of the 19th century, the activity of the Trades Council remained one of discouraging strikes and seeking a continued reconciliation between employer and union in the workplace. Industrial disputes were rare, but when they arose, the view of the Council, expressed in 1891, was,

"Where these have occurred it has been, as hitherto, the policy of the Trades Council to promote agreement between employers and employed and in several instances, this intervention has been successful, disputes have been satisfactorily adjusted, friendly relations restored and the thanks of both parties received". 104

The policy of the Trades Council was to seek to demonstrate that trade unionism did not encourage strikes, rather the potential of organised labour would be sufficient to achieve improvements without the need to resort to industrial action.

The Trades Unions that did emerge in Birmingham during the last quarter of the century, sought policies of industrial conciliation. Brass workers had a joint council to resolve differences with employers, while tin plate workers stressed the importance of benefits over industrial action. The Bedstead Workmen's Association entered into a closed shop arrangement, initiated by the employers, to restrict competition in the trade. It was not uncommon for those craft societies to form agreed price lists with their employers. In 1898, 79 different trade unions were affiliated to the Trades Council. Despite this growth in organisations, the size of unions

remained small and the proportion of workers in unions remained low, but the co-operation with employers was generally sustained. Even the 1897 Engineering lock-out failed to disturb the climate of Birmingham industrial relations. No Birmingham engineering firm could be persuaded by the Employers Federation to join the dispute, for the fear of such action upon their relationship with their workforce.¹⁰⁵

In 1898 the Birmingham Trades Council in an oblique reference to the lock out could state:

"There has been an entire absence of any serious labour disputes, a spirit of conciliation having prevailed which has enabled organised workmen to meet organised employers and thus by reasoning and reciprocity, decisions have been arrived at which have maintained an honourable peace, beneficial to workmen, employers and the community. However, what may be said in this respect of Birmingham cannot be said for the whole country".¹⁰⁶

In Birmingham, prior to the 20th century, labour generally remained poorly organised. In those skilled trades where trade unionism had developed, it possessed the conservative aspects of craft unionism. Although industry in Coventry was not as diverse as that found in Birmingham, the heritage of silk weaving and watch making displayed close associations with the pre-industrial era.¹⁰⁷ Coventry retained many of the features of feudal society well into the second half of the 19th century. The weaving, and later, watch making industries were dominated by small masters. Pre industrial apprenticeship was sustained, industrial development in the city was restricted by the close relationship of the small masters with the land.¹⁰⁸ They had effectively resisted land enclosure until 1860, preserved "rights in Common" to the detriment of modern industrial growth within the town.¹⁰⁹

Mass production industries spread largely unhindered by a craft tradition. As table 2.1 suggests, in Warwickshire and Staffordshire, counties which included Coventry, Birmingham and the Black Country, little more than 1 : 5 adult male workers were likely to have been members of a trade union in 1892.

TABLE 2.1

DENSITY OF TRADE UNION MEMBERSHIP
IN THE WEST MIDLANDS 1891-2

<u>COUNTY</u>	<u>ADULT MALE</u> <u>WORKERS *</u> (OOOs)	<u>MEMBERSHIP OF</u> <u>TRADE UNIONS =</u> (OOOs)	<u>DENSITY</u> %
Staffordshire	220.7	49.5	22.4
Warwickshire	160.3	33.6	21.2
Oxford	37.6	1.8	4.7

* Figure is calculated at 20% of population figures in 1891 census.

= Drawn from distribution of trade unionists made by S & B Webb.
See S & B Webb, The History of Trade Unionism, Longmans,
London, 1920, p 741-2.

In Oxford, still a predominant rural county, the figure was less than 5%. These estimates compare with Table 2.2 for the Northern Counties of Northumberland, Durham, Lancashire and the East Riding of Yorkshire, where between 40% to 57% male adults could be reckoned to be in a trade union.

TABLE 2.2

ESTIMATED DENSITY OF TRADE UNION MEMBERSHIP
IN THE NORTHERN COUNTIES 1891-2

<u>COUNTY</u>	<u>ADULT MALE</u> <u>WORKERS *</u> (OOOs)	<u>MEMBERSHIP OF</u> <u>TRADE UNIONS =</u> (OOOs)	<u>DENSITY</u> %
Northumberland	101,206	56.8	56.4
Durham	204,878	114.8	55.6
Lancashire	791,581	331.5	41.0
Yorkshire, West Riding	63,714	23.6	37.5

* Figure is calculated at 20% of population figures in 1891 census.

= Drawn from distribution of trade unionist made by S & B Webb.
See S & B Webb, The History of Trade Unionism, Longmans,
London, 1920, p 741-2.

Table 2.3 which compares trade unionism in urban populations, demonstrates that, with the exception of London, Birmingham remained one of the weakest industrial cities in Britain for trade union membership.

TABLE 2.3

ESTIMATED DENSITY OF TRADE UNION MEMBERSHIP
IN INDUSTRIAL URBAN TOWNS

<u>TOWN</u>	<u>ADULT MALE</u> <u>WORKERS *</u> (OOOs)	<u>MEMBERSHIP OF</u> <u>TRADE UNIONS</u> (OOOs)	<u>DENSITY</u> %
Oldham	40.2	25	62.1
Glasgow		98	
Newcastle	65.6	26.5	40.3
Birmingham	124.2	26.0	20.9
(London	1,103.5	194	17.5)

* Only 20% of the adult male workforce in Birmingham were union members, whereas in Oldham and on Tyneside the membership levels stood at more than 66% and 40% respectively.

The weakness of the craft tradition in engineering can be observed from Table 2.4 drawn from membership of the A S E in the principle areas where the motor industry became centred.

TABLE 2.4

TOTAL MEMBERSHIP AND NUMBER OF BRANCHES
OF THE A S E IN THE WEST AND SOUTH MIDLANDS

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>BIRMINGHAM</u> <u>& DISTRICT</u>	<u>BRANCHES</u>	<u>COVENTRY</u>	<u>BRANCHES</u>	<u>OXFORD</u>	<u>BRANCHES</u>
1859	292	1	0	0	0	0
1875	818	4	80	1	14	1
1885	1721	8	240	1	17	1
1898	2333	13	581	3	23	1
1913	4717	20	2577	8	24	1
1918	9986	32	4904	15	62	1

Source: A S E

Before 1859 only one branch of the A S E existed in the West Midlands, while membership in Oxford remained small even at the end of the first world war. For the Midlands it is significant that the growth in

engineering craftsmen develops with the expansion of new industries, rather than pre dates it. While in Coventry, A S E membership largely takes place in the 20th century with the growth of the motor industry. In 1886, only 7% of A S E membership were working piecework, by 1906 this had reached 32%.¹¹⁰ In 1891 however, already 44% of A S E members in the West Midlands were pieceworkers, while in Coventry the figures was 80%.¹¹¹ The high proportion of engineering workers engaged in piecework is indicative of the modernity of West Midlands industry and the policies of modern management and the mass basis of its component products. The weakness of a craft tradition is illustrated in Table 2.5 which shows that two and a half times the percentage in general engineering labour were semi skilled workers in Coventry, compared to the national average for engineering in 1911. In the other important centres of engineering,

TABLE 2.5
COMPOSITION OF LABOUR FORCE IN
GENERAL ENGINEERING 1911 (PERCENTAGE)

	<u>SHEFFIELD</u>	<u>GLASGOW</u>	<u>COVENTRY</u>	<u>NATIONAL</u>
Skilled and Labourers	84	81	55	82
Semi skilled	16	19	45	18

Source: J Hinton

the composition of the workforce largely expressed the traditional polarisation between skilled and unskilled; there the growth of semi skilled employment developed mainly through the dilution of craft control during the war period.

The expansion of employment in the new industries, in many instances, took place among workers without previous engineering backgrounds or trade union membership. Craft workers were not adverse to seeking semi skilled work during slack periods.¹¹² Despite the fluctuation in

trade and the seasonal basis of much of the employment in the manufacture of bicycles and the early motor cars, the semi skilled nature of the employment secured an industrial dependence upon particular abilities. It was this reliance upon a stratum of semi skilled workers, rather than the regularity of employment, which provided an industrial identification and continuity which formed the potential for trade union recruitment. Employers invariably preferred workers experienced in the techniques and discipline of the industry. The instability in the product market however, which led to sharp changes in the demand for labour, resulted in instability in trade union membership. It was the Workers Union, formed just after the engineering lockout of 1897 by Tom Mann, a leading member of the A S E, which attempted to unionise semi skilled workers employed in the small arms, cycle and motor industries.

Before 1913, membership of the W U in the West Midlands was largely erratic.¹¹³ Depression in trade resulted in rapid decline of members and closure of branches. In 1907, one-fifth of its total 5,000 membership was in the Birmingham area, but following an increase in unemployment during 1908-9, a third of this membership was lost. The W U did begin to pay a range of benefits, though not on the scale of the craft unions, in an attempt to increase revenue and encourage membership recruitment and stability. Just before the first world war, the unions transformed itself into a powerful force for lesser skilled workers in the mass engineering industries. A series of strikes to gain a guaranteed minimum piecework wage, resulted in a rapid growth in membership across the West Midlands.¹¹⁴ The pursuit of a universal minimum strengthened the appeal of the union beyond the traditional confines of sectional interests, typified by

craft unions. Organising all grades among the lesser skilled, enabled the weaker sections of workers to gain from the actions of the strongest. Youths and female labour thus gained from a general as opposed to group improvements.

Guaranteed minimum wages helped to reduce the volatility in piecework earnings. This unified strategy among the semi skilled workers in the leading Coventry car plants in 1912, succeeded in establishing common minimum levels and overtime rates tied to those paid to craft workers.¹¹⁵ The organised strength of the W U resulted in the local employers association granting recognition of the union in its Disputes Procedure. A largely successful strike wave across Birmingham and the Black Country, resulting in the payment of a minimum rate produced a massive growth in W U membership. By 1914, the W U became the largest union in the modern industries of the West Midlands. Its membership had increased from 5,000 to over 50,000, or more than five times the membership of the A S E. Its membership in Coventry stood at 3,000 at the beginning of the first world war. This compared with 2,500 in the A S E., 800 in the NUVB, 400 in the Steam Engine Makers, 590 Brass and Metal Mechanics, 400 United Machine Workers Association and 400 Birmingham Tinsplate and Sheet Metal Workers Union.¹¹⁶

It was largely the result of the rapid expansion of engineering employment in munitions production and the adoption of the new industries, of which the motor industry was the most important, during the first world war, which brought about mass trade unionism in the West Midlands. Before 1914, despite the active presence of the Workers Union, trade unionism in Birmingham, Coventry, and Wolverhampton was still largely confined to an excessive number of

small craft organisations. In 1911, the total trade union membership in engineering in those towns, numbered just 8,111 or only 4.3% of the total national engineering trade union membership.¹¹⁷

By the end of 1914, the West Midlands accounted for just under one-third of the total engineering trade union membership. Its total of 71,842 union members more than doubled by 1917.¹¹⁸ The vast expansion of the plant and technology of the motor industry for munitions production, had dramatically increased the importance of the new industries, and resulted in considerable increases in union membership, particularly among the lesser skilled workforces.

PART 3

UNEMPLOYMENT, THE LABOUR MARKET
AND WORKPLACE POWER

Abstract

Part three provides an account of how, during the inter war depression, the leading British motor manufacturers pioneered labour relations strategies, with the objective of gaining a managerial compliance of individual workers in the work situation. Through policies of "open shop" recruitment, and with the application of incentive wage policies designed to secure a close identification of the worker to the detailed objectives of production management techniques, the motor manufacturers, in the main assembly plants, combined a traditional employer paternalism with a promise of relatively high wages, in a labour market which held a fear of unemployment.

The section begins by providing an outline of a volatile labour market on the patterns of job insecurity in the motor industry. It demonstrates how national defects, experienced by organised labour in 1922 and 1926, had direct consequences for the dramatic decline in trade union membership and the loss of workplace power in the West Midland car factories. The final section examines how the effects of employer strategy towards workplace relations and the consequent demise of organised wage labour, in a highly competitive product market, exploded into mass power conflicts between unorganised workforces and managements, following attempts to intensify the productivity of semi-skilled labour, while seeking a reduction in wage rates. In the conditions of the labour market and through labour insecurity in the workplace, a managerial strategy, which successfully overcome the presence of an organised workplace, had to confront a spontaneous exercise of power by non unionised workforces outside the decision making process. When faced with strike committees and workplace demands, based upon the direct militancy of the shop floor, the motor manufacturers preferred to deal with

trade union officials within the industrial relations framework of the employers federation. The growth of trade unionism in the motor industry followed workplace militancy. While union membership provided the possibility for continuous organisation, the spontaneous nature of workplace conflict sustained a capacity for workplace autonomy. Towards the end of the 1930's, particularly in the shadow factories built by the motor manufacturers for the production of aero-engines, the autonomy of workplace initiatives of shop floor organisations co-existed under an umbrella of mass trade union organisation.

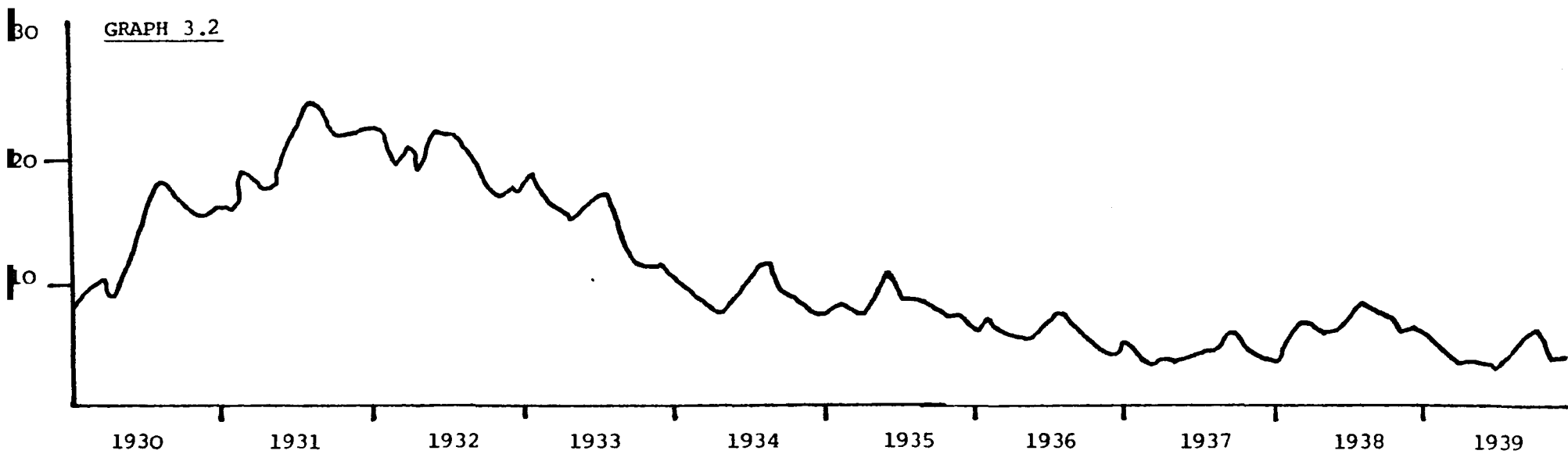
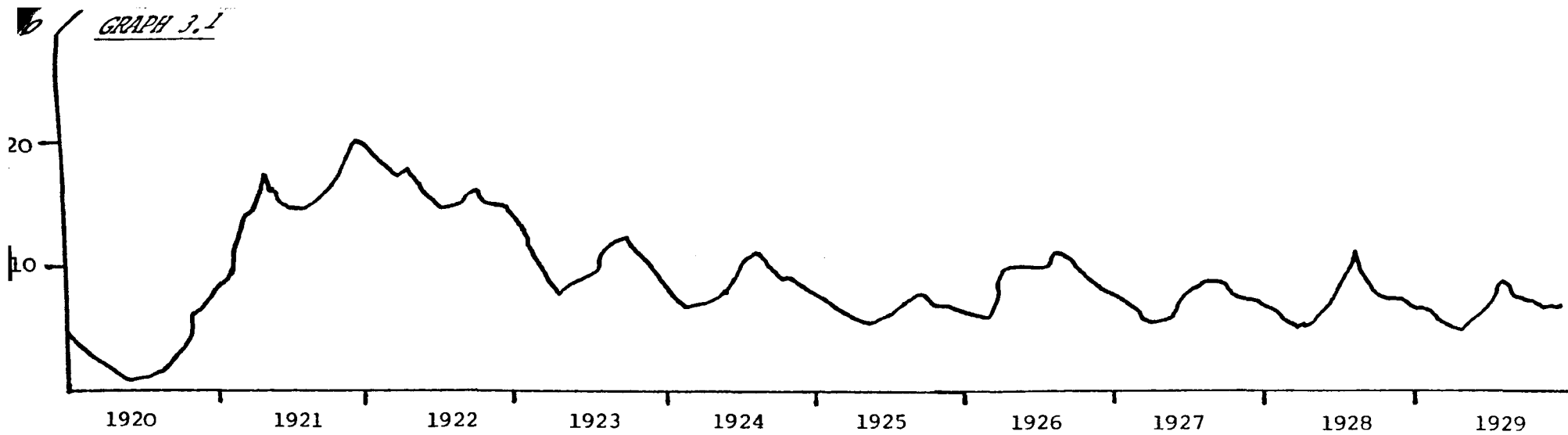
The Shop Stewards movement, which had been built up during the first world war, collapsed dramatically during the early 1920s. The recession in the British economy, the employers lockout in engineering, and the aftermath of the 1926 General Strike, had a demoralising and retarding effect upon workplace organisation. In the motor industry, the shop stewards movement, which had operated across the Birmingham and Coventry plants converted to munitions, had disintegrated with the re-establishment of vehicle production in the inter war period. Trade Union membership, itself, declined in these districts, between 1918 and 1934. Output, employment and job dependence in motor vehicles expanded but within a framework of a high level of job insecurity. This was a combination of a cycle of excessive overtime, nightshift working, short-time working, lay off and unemployment. As the industry moved towards large scale organisation, the domination of the market by fewer companies, the technology, working methods and payments system changed. The absence of trade unionism was most marked among the semi skilled workers, recruited to the new mass production centres of car assembly. A significant decline, however, also occurred among workers whose occupations had a craft heritage. This erosion of trade union power, and, in many instances, a virtual elimination of workplace organisation, enhanced formal managerial power and authority but did so upon a basis which was to provide the pre conditions for the development of future workplace trade unionism.

Employment in the construction and manufacture of vehicles grew throughout the inter war period. In a four year period from 1923 to 1927, 39,000 new jobs emerged, while in the twelve year period from

1927 to 1939, the workforce in vehicle construction grew by 220,000.¹ Employment in the motor industry virtually doubled during the inter war period. Compared to the position in 1923, a further quarter of a million workers were recruited to the industry before the outbreak of the second world war.

Unemployment in the vehicle industry fell during the first half of 1920. In June of that year it reached just over 3,000 or 1.4% of the workforce.² This early post war boom quickly began to collapse during 1921 and 1922. In Graph 3.1 the monthly recorded figures for the percentage unemployed for workers in vehicle construction can be seen to rise sharply from mid-1920 until mid-1921. Within 18 months, unemployment had risen from its lowest point during the whole inter war period to its highest recorded level in the 1920s, reaching a figure of 44,000, or 18% of those employed in the industry by December 1921. For the 12 months of 1922, more than one in three of the workforce remained unemployed. It was not until the beginning of 1923, that the industry's unemployment began to fall below 15%. Throughout the 20 year inter war period to 1939, in 90 single months, or 37.5% of the time, unemployment among car workers was above 10%. During 54 single months it stood above 15% and in only 25 months did it fall below 5%,³ of these months appeared in a single year, 1920.

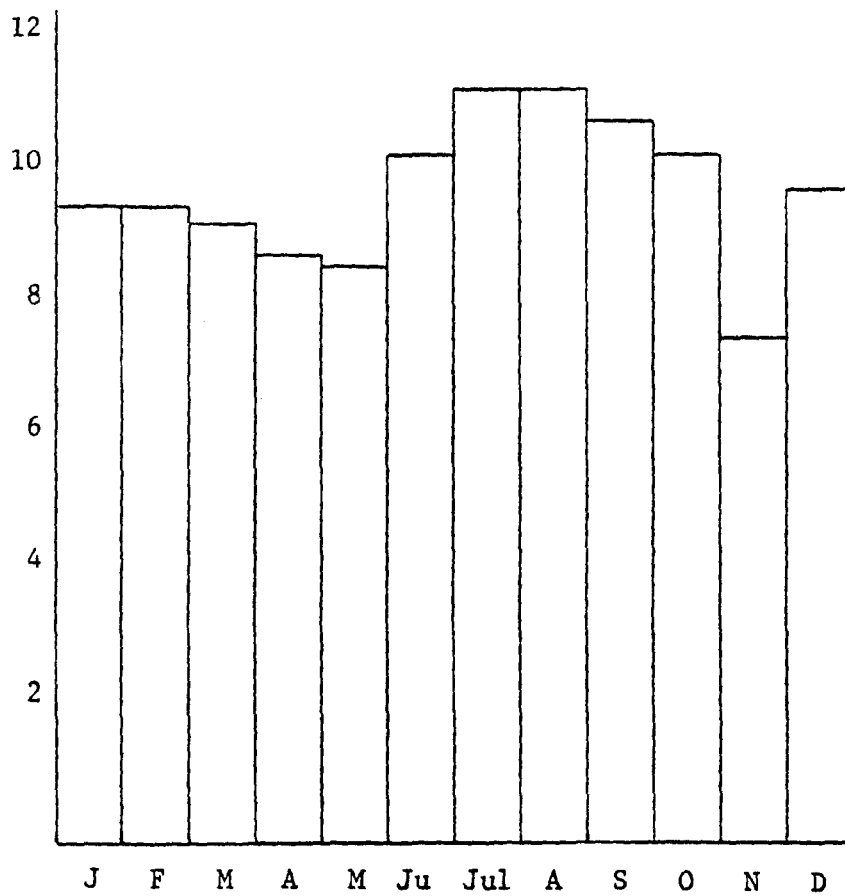
The peak of the inter war unemployment was reached during the first half of the 1930s. Graph 3.2 illustrates that, between 1930 and 1932, monthly unemployment was above 20%, more than one in five of the workforce being unemployed for 14 monthly figures. In the crisis year of 1931, unemployment peaked at 60,300, virtually a quarter of the workforce. Moreover, throughout the whole period the job



dependence of wage labour in the inter war motor industry, remained based upon sharp fluctuations in the product market. Despite the overall expansion of this sector of the economy, the position of the individual worker was frequently prone to short time working and layoff. The manpower policy's practiced by management, provided no assurances of employment continuity for those in possession of a job. Graph 3.3 presents the monthly mean unemployment percentage for all workers engaged in vehicle construction between 1920-1939. The graph demonstrates the annual tendency for unemployment to rise through the mid-summer months from June to September, and decline in the period after the new car models had entered into production following the London motor show, held in November each year. While just under an average of 8% could still remain unemployed in November, in July and August the average for the 19 year period rose to just under 12%. For those employed in the mass assembly plants, this pattern of monthly fluctuations is likely to have been even sharper. Employment, particularly for the semi skilled batch worker, would take on almost a casual dimension.

The general pattern of development in the industry, however, was towards an overall increase in production. Graph 3.4 illustrates the tendency of increases in production to be related to an annual average per centage fall in the level of unemployment. With the exception of 1926, the year of the General Strike, the expansion of the industry between 1923 and 1928, correlates with a significant fall in the average annual percentage figure for unemployment. The much faster growth of production in the industry after 1932, though it results in a greater percentage fall in the annual level of

GRAPH 3.3 MONTHLY MEAN UNEMPLOYMENT IN VEHICLE CONSTRUCTION
1920-1939 (PERCENTAGE)

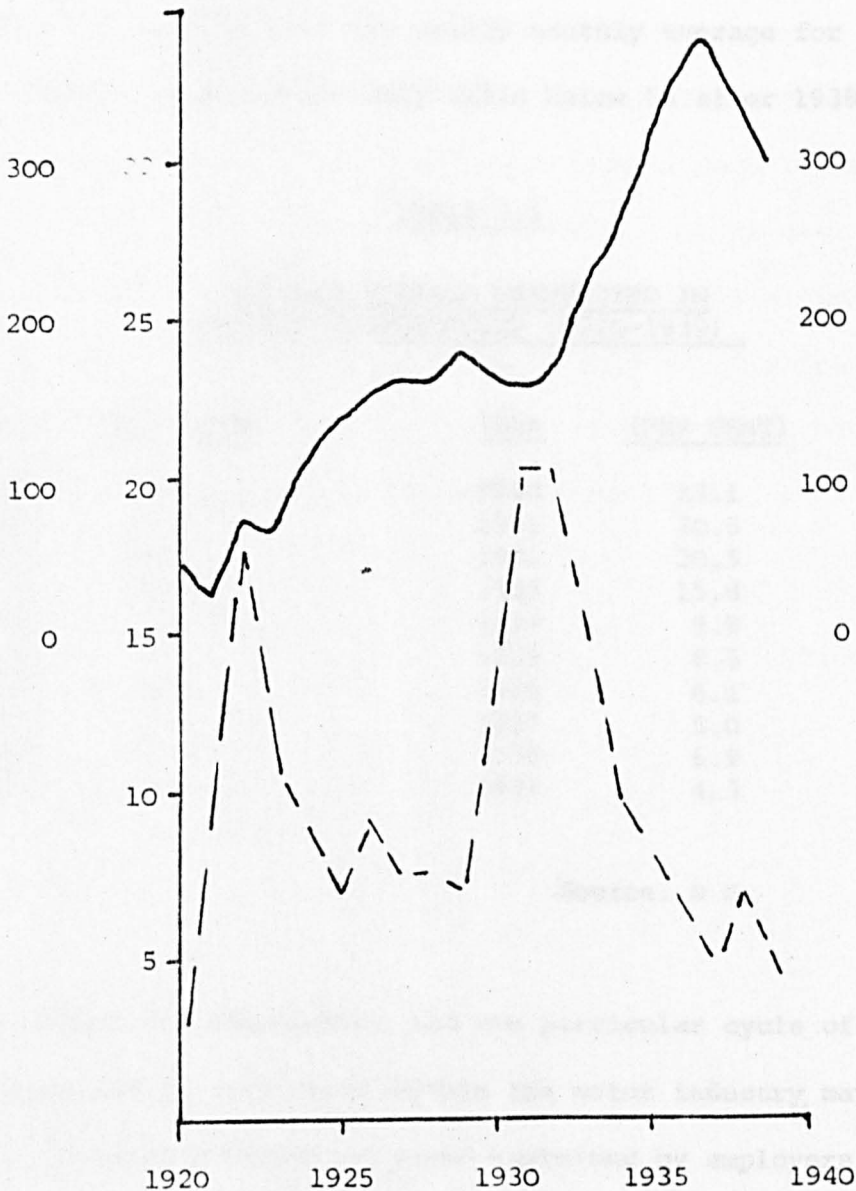


Source: D.E.

Graph 3.4 - Annual Car Production and
Yearly Average Unemployment
1920-1939.

Production —————
% Unemployed - - - - -

Source : SMMT and DE



unemployment, the rate of production level and percentage unemployment between the two periods suggests that the effects of reorganisation during the depression, and the fall in the dependence of craft labour in mass assembly, was increasing both employment and productivity in the industry for wage labour, but without a corresponding improvement in employment continuity or job security. Table 3.1 reveals that the yearly monthly average for unemployment in vehicle construction only falls below 5% after 1938.

TABLE 3.1

MONTHLY AVERAGE UNEMPLOYED IN
VEHICLE CONSTRUCTION (1920-1939)

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>(PER CENT)</u>	<u>YEAR</u>	<u>(PER CENT)</u>
1920	2.8	1930	13.1
1921	13.5	1931	20.5
1922	16.4	1932	20.5
1923	10.8	1933	15.8
1924	8.9	1934	9.9
1925	7.0	1935	8.5
1926	9.2	1936	6.1
1927	7.5	1937	5.0
1928	7.6	1938	6.9
1929	6.9	1939	4.3

Source: D E

The effect of unemployment and the particular cycle of job insecurity experienced by workforces within the motor industry, may have enhanced the potential position of power exercised by employers over wage labour. The fear of unemployment may have provided employers with opportunities for maintaining labour discipline upon their terms in the workplace, ^{but} despite the weaknesses in organised labour, these conditions were to prove insufficient grounds whereby employers could entirely gain worker compliance. The employer strategy to continually increase the productivity and job deprivation of wage

labour, through a policy of price cutting and speed up, came under severe challenge on a number of occasions. In an industry engaged in a ruthless competition in the product market, the practices of management in the implementation of these policies began to increasingly erode a paternalistic basis of common interest and the anti-union basis upon which employer strategy in labour relations was based. It was from the particular experiences of unorganised action outside the institutional decision making process, that gave rise to the form of power exercised by wage labour in this formative period. Unemployment, however, was to deal a severe blow to workplace recognition, but without entirely diminishing workplace independence. It was the pursuit of managerial strategy, within the period of transformation in the motor industry which was to clarify the independent interest of wage labour.

The high and irregular patterns of unemployment within the motor industry between 1921 and 1939, had a considerable bearing upon the level of trade unionism and the form of workplace power. The weakened position of workforces in the labour market, enhanced the potential of management to maximise their interests. For engineering workers in general, the sharp increase in unemployment at the beginning of the 1920s met with an immediate response on the part of employers. In the year preceding the Engineering Employers Lockout, 27 of the 56 strikes in engineering arose in opposition to management attempts to reduce piecework prices and bonus payments.³ The 'Lockout', which lasted 3 months and involved 260,000 workers, including car workers from some federated establishments, incurred the loss of over thirteen and a half million working days. It was followed by a fall in engineering strikes particularly after the 1926 General Strike. A revival of strikes did not occur until just prior to the second world war. In the motor industry a similar decline of conflict emerges. The sharp rise in unemployment in the closing weeks of 1920, was met by an immediate response from employers. The Coventry District Organiser for the A E U could report at the end of 1920 that:

"For the past 20 years our members have never experienced such times. The unemployed have held meetings to solve the problem, but the present regime cannot make the state of things any better. Some are endeavouring to support industrial unionism".⁴

As the severity of the recession set in, in early February 1921 the same observer could state:

"Men in many factories are working no more than two days per week notwithstanding the fact that close on 3,000 of our members are totally unemployed. These factors are - to my mind - the reason why employers are having a vamp on wages. Their impression must be that the lash of hunger will drive our men to work at lower rates".⁵

As more than two thirds of the membership of the engineering union alone, were unemployed in the second month of 1921, the Coventry motor employers used the opportunity to attempt to reduce wage levels by attacking piecework prices. Employers argued that they could only increase employment through lower wages. Throughout 1921, in line with a general movement in reductions in wages and changes in working conditions across engineering, the Coventry employers considerably eroded the influence of trade union organisation. The District organiser claimed in his report for May, 1921,

"The employers are unduly taking advantage of their economic power - and make no mistake - they intend to lower our standards of living unless we show a bold front".⁶

and,

".....Many firms discharging our members... making it obvious to me that some employers are paving the way for our members to accept withdrawal of Churchill awards through semi-starvation".⁷

By November 1921, in Coventry, the realisation of this employer offensive appeared all but complete. Again the District Organiser wrote,

"The employers as a whole are taking advantage of their economic power and using it with vengeance against us on every occasion. Under duress we are having to accept many things we would not have given consideration to some twelve months ago. It cannot last much longer and it is to be expected that our members will not allow the malpractices of some employers to slip from their memories when a change in conditions does arise".⁸

The change in conditions, to 1920 levels of 1.4% unemployment did not occur until 1941. The 1920s remained a declining defensive struggle against the lowering of conditions and changes in working methods. Pieceworking systems facilitated the possibility of regular price reductions with changes in work content. Between 1921 and 1930, 16 of the 40 disputes which arose in the vehicle industry were in opposition to lowering of piecework rates.⁹ The seasonal lay off of car workers during the period prior to the increased demand for cars which followed the annual November motor show, provided ideal circumstances for employers to enter into alterations in rates. New models, or general changes in models, necessitated changes in work content. Negotiation within the plants at the outset of new production invariably meant that employers were negotiating with men freshly recruited from "the lash of hunger". This undoubtedly affected workplace organisation and the allegiance toward trade unionism, though the general defeats of organised labour clearly had an impact.

Although unionisation among less skilled workers had far surpassed craft unionists in the motor plants producing munitions, by 1918, in the West Midlands, the organisation of the shop steward movement in both Coventry and Birmingham was largely sustained by the craft representatives.¹⁰ This arose from the fact that the major issues which confronted the workplace were invariably craft questions. Not only did craft unionism promote a wider representation of interests on the shop floor, through shop stewards, but the unilateral effects of government policies affecting the status of craft workers encouraged a more widely organised response. The implications of the embargo imposed under provisions of the Defense of the Realm Act during July 1918, was seen to violate a basic principle of wage labour. The response of the war time shop stewards movement had

been to defend,

"The principle that every man should have the right to dispose of his own labour as he wishes".¹¹

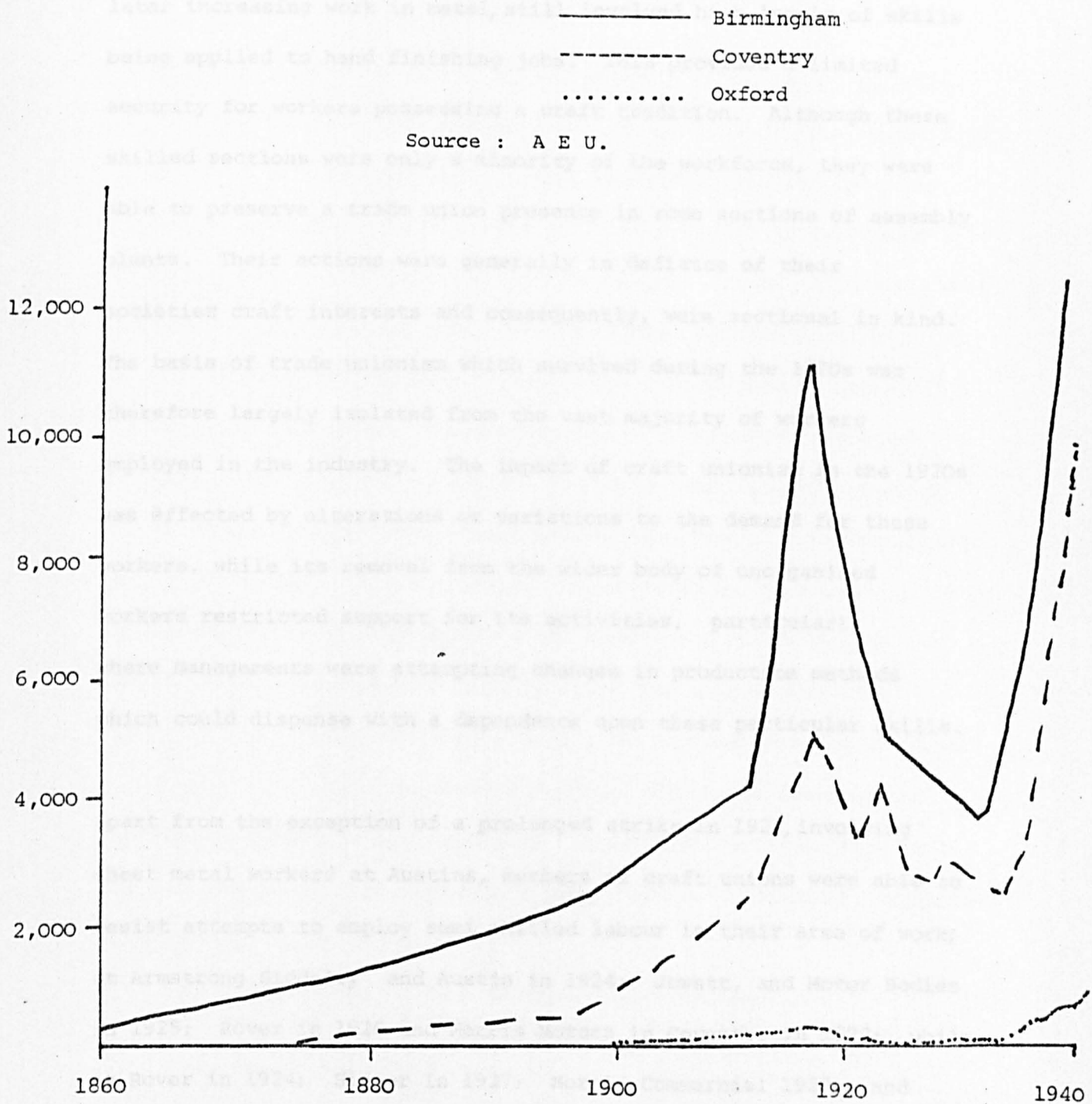
Its application, which restricted the movement of skilled labour, met with widespread strikes beyond the immediate factories concerned. In Coventry 12,000, A S E and A T S workers struck independently of the general view of the Coventry Engineering Joint Committee, which comprised of shop stewards mainly drawn from the skilled trades. The spread of the strike to Birmingham met with even wider support. Again, the majority of unions associated with the Birmingham Joint Committee were drawn from the skilled unions. Over 60,000 skilled workers became involved, up to 100,000 workers were affected, with 89% of all munitions workers being out.¹² It was the fear of an extension of government 'interference with "rights" of craft workers in the labour market, that lay behind such widespread protest. The fact that the dispute had been conducted against the wishes and sympathies of local trade union officials, and in the case of Coventry, in opposition to many of the craft delegated shop stewards on the C E J C, was indicative of the level of organisation and the will of certain craft unions to act independently of wider organisations when their perceived basic interests appeared to be threatened.

The power of organised labour, which had accumulated under wartime conditions by 1918, in the West Midlands was altered by the restoration of car production. Craft workers still possessed an advantage, as large sections of semi skilled labour, specifically recruited for munitions work, were dismissed with the decline in armaments. This change-over, plus the sharp recession in the motor industry, had an impact upon trade union membership.¹³ The fall was most marked among

the less skilled. During the severe unemployment of 1921, membership of the Workers Union fell by one half. Between 1920 and 1923, it had lost over 70% of its half million membership. The 50,000 members it possessed in 1920, in the West Midlands, was down to 4,000 by 1929. In the A E U, membership fell by a half during the 1920s. Graph 3.5 presents the movement of membership in the principle districts of motor manufacture. By 1930, membership in Birmingham was less than a half of the 1920 figure, while in Coventry it was about a third. A E U membership in Oxford was almost without significance until 1938. The important loss in membership took place during the rapid unemployment prior to the Engineering Employers Lockout, although production continues to generally increase from 1922 until the economic crisis of 1931-33. Also the average yearly level of unemployment, despite seasonal fluctuations, falls between 1922 and 1929 with the exception of 1925 in Coventry. A E U skilled membership, while not as devastated as that of the less skilled workers, does not begin to revive until 1934.

The exercise of overt power conflict, measured by strikes reflects the level of trade union organisation. In particular, it represents the transformation of the role of craft labour within the industry. Between 1921 and 1930, of the 31 disputes which took place in the industry, 27 concerned craft workers.¹⁴ Only 4 disputes involved less skilled workers. Although 22 of the strikes which took place in this period occurred at the main assembly plants, 11 involved coach builders; 3 included sheet metal workers; 3 took place among woodworkers; and 1 arose in a toolroom. In the supply industry all eight strikes which took place involved coach builders.¹⁵ Only four disputes took place before 1930 among semi skilled workers and

Graph 3.5 : ASE/AEU membership
1860-1940



all of these were in 1929 and 1930. The dependence upon craft skills of workers in wood, at the beginning of the decade and the later increasing work in metal, still involved high levels of skills being applied to hand finishing jobs. This provided a limited security for workers possessing a craft tradition. Although these skilled sections were only a minority of the workforce, they were able to preserve a trade union presence in some sections of assembly plants. Their actions were generally in defiance of their societies craft interests and consequently, were sectional in kind. The basis of trade unionism which survived during the 1920s was therefore largely isolated from the vast majority of workers employed in the industry. The impact of craft unionism in the 1920s was affected by alterations or variations to the demand for these workers, while its removal from the wider body of unorganised workers restricted support for its activities, particularly where managements were attempting changes in production methods which could dispense with a dependence upon these particular skills.

Apart from the exception of a prolonged strike in 1921, involving sheet metal workers at Austins, members of craft unions were able to resist attempts to employ semi skilled labour in their area of work; at Armstrong Siddeley and Austin in 1924; Jowett, and Motor Bodies in 1925; Rover in 1926 and Morris Motors in Coventry in 1928; while at Rover in 1924; Singer in 1927; Morris Commercial 1929; and Vulcan in 1930; the craft unions were able to successfully oppose non union labour.¹⁶ Where skilled labour was employed upon piecework, their ability to resist reductions or gain increases through industrial action were far more mixed. Coach builders at Austin in 1921 and Morris Motors in 1928, sheet metal workers at Vulcan in 1922 and woodcutters at Humber, all conceded reductions in prices following strikes. Only among coach builders at Sunbeam in

1923 , Guy Motors, 1924 and Motor Bodies in 1925, did strikes among craft workers result in increases in prices.¹⁷

The general decline in the organised power of trade unionism during the 1920s, was visibly demonstrated in the motor industry. Membership of trade unions was confined to small pockets of skilled workers. A premium upon their skills, plus a collective will in particular instances to resist changes in working methods which would undermine employer dependence upon their labour, formed the character of limited trade union activity in the 1920s. Craft worker interests were largely sectional. The development of pieceworking and use of price fixers, further encouraged sectional work groups responses to management regulations. Pieceworking facilitated the possibility of regular changes in the price of labour which could enable managements to gain advantages of the employment relation in a market economy possessing a high level of job insecurity. The dependence upon unionised skills meant that the managements advantage could never be total. The severity of the effect of unemployment however can hardly be overestimated. Observing the experience of sharp increases in unemployment, in 1921, the A E U District Organiser wrote, in his March report,

"No improvement. Less working short time but more unemployed... The worst feature of it is that employers say they could employ more if wages were lowered. When they are challenged as to the true position we find that in some shops employment could not be provided if men agreed to work for no wages whatsoever. Many of our members at the present time would rather believe the employer than believe those who are appointed to look after their interest. It is questionable if ever there was such panic among our members at any former time".¹⁸

An outcome of the weakness of organised labour was an increasing acceptance by sections of workforces of a managerial view of their interests. However, in the same year, Armstrong Siddeley,

attempting to introduce changes in working methods, were consulting shop stewards,¹⁹ while at Singer in Coventry the introduction of a nightshift to meet seasonal demand was negotiated by the District Secretary of the A E U., upon the basis of national union rates. It was the District Secretary who would supply the labour, the implications of which the District Organiser was not slow to state.

"This would evidently be nauseating to non-union labour".²⁰

Although the District Organiser praised the loyalty of sections of the membership during the 11 weeks of the Employers lockout, the dispute had a major impact upon the position of organised labour in the Engineering Union.

"Give credit to our members", declared the organisers report, for the determination displayed especially so since the employers opened the gates of their workshops".²¹

and speaking of unemployed engineering members the organiser could remark of Coventry:

"I believe that I voice the aspiration of the division when I say that our very best thanks are due to these people for not only refusing to accept employment, but for the splendid services rendered by them by way of picketing during the whole time the lockout lasted".²²

Beyond the employer dependence upon skills, and the level of vulnerability in the labour market, the toll of the lockout was felt at the level of union organisation. In Coventry, membership of the A E U fell by 52 per cent in the first twelve months after the lockout, in Birmingham the loss was 42 per cent. At Austins, a reduction in rates took place, while in Coventry, numbers of A E U members were reported still not re-employed in January 1923. The President of the District Committee, following 16 months unemployment was forced to emigrate to Australia, largely on account of his trade union activities.²³ In Oxford, 19 workers who had formed a lockout

committee were not offered their jobs back.²⁴ The A E U DC only met twice in the next 12 months.²⁵

During 1924 and 1925 the demand for cars picked up. At the prospect of recovering lost membership, a campaign of factory gate meetings was organised jointly by the District Committee of the A E U and the Trade Council in Coventry, under the slogan "Back to the Unions".²⁶ Weaknesses in organisation, plus the extent of non union labour, were viewed as the main reasons for acceptance of reductions in piecework prices. The General Strike of 1926, which came at the end of the season for car production, had widespread consequences for recruitment. The strike appears to have been fairly widely supported in Coventry²⁷ motor firms, but the response in Birmingham was much less impressive. In Oxford it was totally ignored.

Industrial life in Birmingham was virtually unaffected by the strike. In the large car plants, though Wolesley Motors stopped, less than 50 workers withdrew labour at Lanchester works. Of the 8,000 workers at Austins, only a few hundred craft unionists struck.²⁸ Their action was typically in isolation. The vehicle builders who came out, were ordered back by the local officials.²⁹ Meanwhile, 30 wood machinists were on strike for a day, while a number of toolroom workers came out independently of the activity of the other crafts. Production was little affected.³⁰ Austin management was able to draw upon the loyalty of sections of its workforce, not only to refrain from striking, but also to ensure the safety of the works.³¹ Non-union labour vastly outnumbered trade unionists and the fear of possible reprisals, through lay off and possible loss of future employment opportunities, led to little sympathetic strike action taking place on the part of non-union labour. In Oxford, where A E U membership had fallen from 120 in 1918 to 50, there is no evidence that any trade

unionist supported the general strike.³² Once again the DC went into decline, failing to meet for over two years.

The conclusion of the General Strike, during a period of rising unemployment in the motor industry, aided employer influence over their workforces. Coventry and Birmingham firms, particularly non-federated ones, were refusing to hold works conferences and were rejecting interviews with trade union officials.³³ At Sunbeam in Birmingham, piecework prices were being altered without mutual agreement. The works committee was being ignored. Management taking the view that it had no need to function.³⁴ Woilesley were discharging trade unionists.³⁵ The motor trade was in its worst state for 3 years, 6,000 unemployed were walking the streets of Coventry by November.³⁶ In the following two years, the season for employment grew shorter, unemployment lasted longer and apathy became firmer during the height of the depression at the beginning of the 1930s. The Birmingham Information Bureau, in its publicity brochure designed to attract industry to the city, informed prospective employers,

"Birmingham labour is good, plentiful and cheap; lower wages are paid here compared with London"...Labour unrest is practically unknown. Birmingham is an ideal centre for speeded-up production".³⁷

It claimed that the majority of engineering fitters were being paid 8 per cent less than their counterparts in the South East of England.

The reorganisation of the production of cars upon a much larger scale, as a result of heavy investment in new plant and equipment, significantly reduced a dependence on craft working, encouraged the employment of migrant labour on semi skilled tasks and installed American methods of flow line production techniques, which altered

the shape of British car assembly. This led to a rapid transformation in labour relations. It was the very ".... ideal centre for speeded-up production...." which gave rise to the spread of early forms of worker protest among the almost totally unorganised mass of semi skilled workers. New technology and economic depression removing much of the contribution of the crafts, was paving the way for the organised domination of the semi skilled worker.

Between 1930 and 1939, no disputes took place in the supplier industries. Twenty strikes took place in the plants of main assembly. Of these, 8 involved semi skilled workers, while 12 concerned craft workers, of which 4 were vehicle builders and 4 included sheet metal workers.³⁸ By the 1930s, the largest section of workers drawn into power conflict were the semi skilled. This change in the nature of conflict during the inter-war period, mirrors the transition of the industry from the small independent producer assembling vehicles or sections of vehicles, with a high dependence upon the skills of craft labour, to large scale assembly plants. This change altered the strategic power location of the semi skilled worker within a technologically inter dependent production flow, which at one moment made him far more expendable than the previous status of the craft worker, but whose collective position considerably increased his power to cease production. Large scale stoppages in car production were brought about through the actions of the semi skilled worker, challenging management attempts to intensify the utilisation of his labour.

At the Austin plant in Longbridge, a strike in 1929 arose directly from an attempt by management to make universal changes in basic rates and work levels, in a period of intense competition, following the application of flow line technology. In 1924, a comprehensive reorganisation of the plant had taken place under the guidance of C R E Engelbach, a production engineer, who had executive responsibility for the Longbridge. He claimed that the works were changed to meet production principles.

".....that the work should proceed from machine to machine and from process to process, without any backward movement and that it should flow directly on the assembly line naturally as part of the system..." 39

These principles of integration provided the basis for a higher degree of interdependence in the production process, but combined with a wage policy, formed the basis of a labour relations policy which aimed to rapidly increase productivity. Such an approach was in sharp contrast to the prevailing employer practices in engineering as a whole. Firstly, the reorganisation was tied to an extensive use of piecework which provided the potential for earnings, through individual worker effort, to reach the most favourable level paid anywhere in the district. Secondly, the objective of such a policy was a higher productivity through strengthening the dependence of the worker upon management, and to seek to create a common purpose based around the success of Austin. Such an approach left no room for trade unionism. Engelbach claimed that the effect of reorganisation was to,

"..... increase earnings of operatives not only by the extra skill gained by them owing to larger production, extra facilities for handling machinery etc., but by the confidence shown by these operatives in management, and by what might fairly be termed the insistence by the management on greater earnings".40

An objection to trade unionism developed in conjunction with a high wage reputation in an era of high unemployment. Although the earlier development of the motor car had been based upon a dependence of craft skills for certain aspects of work, which in turn led to tolerance, though not a complete acceptance of union membership among the skilled workers, the adoption of an "open shop" labour policy considerably discouraged union activity among the less skilled worker. The response of the Austin management to the mass

labour unrest across the country in 1926, provides a good illustration of the way in which the motor industry employers were, through reorganisation, also seeking to pioneer a new strategy towards labour.

The Times had claimed that, "the demand for unlimited action is imperious", in its condemnation of the General Strike. During May, however, an exchange took place surrounding the manner upon which employers sought to react to the crisis in labour relations. For Henry Bertick M P, it provided both a challenge and a warning to employers to face up to the basic insecurity of wage labour.

He wrote,

"....the recent industrial crisis is at once a warning and a challenge. A warning that the working class would, haunted by anxiety, lest its meagre standard of life should be debased, is liable to be thrown into violent alarming volcanic upheavals".⁴¹

He called upon the Government to institute a conference between the representatives of both employers and organised labour, to discuss the prevention of increasing hours of work, the reduction of wages, and the basis for establishing a partnership for policy and profits in industry. The centre of his proposal was a call to recognise,

"the need to change workers psychology from one of fear and indifference to one of hope and interest".⁴²

A letter of reply was printed in The Times, on 31 May by Percy Keane, the editor of the Austin Advocate, on behalf of the Austin Motor Co, at Longbridge. It argued that the resolution of worker interest could be overcome by adopting the practices of restructuring pay systems, but made no mention of an industrial partnership with the unions. Keane wrote,

"....the awakening of the workers interest can be brought about most effectively if such interest is bound up with that of the business of which he is employed in such a manner that a result of increased effort is immediately apparent. In other words, that it is clearly reflected in the next forthcoming pay week with a statement showing the case".⁴³

Worker interests were to be compelled by managerial pay policies, rather than scheme for partnership with organised labour or profit sharing.

"The production force of an undertaking should be rewarded directly upon quantity results and a commercial force upon sales accomplished. Individual payments against results in an effective driving force that compels the interest by all parties and leads towards united action in one direction only, that is maximum efficiency. Extra payment upon ascertained profit has certain virtues, but can never owing to inevitable delays in such a system, attain such a concentration of attention on the part of the workers".⁴⁴

The letter went on to claim that the result of those practices at Longbridge had increased output by 52%, reduced car prices by 38%, raised the distribution of wages by 64.9%, while individual earnings rose by 108%, and profit by 93%.⁴⁵

Though Lord Austin was a member of the Engineering Employers Federation and later took part in the Mond-Turner talks,⁴⁶ he publicly opposed trade unions. Austin combined his obligations towards national agreements established through the Employers Federation, with a capacity to, as far as possible, discourage or ignore the presence of trade unionism in the workplace. He held to some of the strong paternalistic traditions of Birmingham Employers towards industrial relations. Such an approach appeared to be reciprocated by the labour force itself during the General Strike. Some 400 of the 8,000 workforce at Longbridge became

'volunteers' or special constables, in order to maintain vital supplies to the workers and preserve continued production.⁴⁷ Of the small number of craft trade unionists who actually took part in the strike they were only offered their jobs back,

"....as conditions allowed and when the company required them".⁴⁸

Although the initial success of the labour relations strategy, which accompanied the programme of reorganisation, could be seen in the threefold increase which took place in sales turnover at Austin - while the expansion of their share in British car production rose from 16% to 24.2% in the three years following the General Strike - it also resulted in a sharp increase in the number of employees. The Longbridge labour force grew from 5,300 in 1924 to 13,500 by 1929. The universal changes in basic rates by management and the intensified competition in the product market was being confronted by a different workforce. A policy of wage reduction amongst predominantly unorganised semi skilled workers, where remuneration was so closely tied to affect, the control of work, and not least the level of the piecework price, became an issue for the semi skilled. At Austin, an autocratic style of management combined with the changes which took place as a result of plant reorganisation, came under challenge as the plant grew in size and management sought wage reductions.

In June 1928, the District Organiser of the A E U reported attending a Local Conference at Austin, arising out of management methods at reducing piecework times. His report claimed,

"....the method adopted being that they notified the men concerned that their engagement must terminate but they can continue if they agree to a reduction in rates".⁴⁹

On the 29 September, the organiser reported that a "marked improvement" had taken place in shop steward organisation inside the engineering shops. During the autumn of 1928, an improvement took place in the motor trade which encouraged the unions to engage in an active recruiting campaign, in both Coventry and Birmingham. But despite a number of factory gate meetings the response was poor. In November, at the height of car production, the report of the engineers National Officer claimed,

"There is still great apathy and indifference being displayed and after the experience we have had I am strongly of the opinion that it is personal contact that is required to bring back in the organisation those men who are reaping the advantages of trade union without payment contributions".⁵⁰

In January 1929, however, the Austin management announced further proposals to introduce a new set of lower piecework times. Just over a month after the acknowledged failure of the unions to encourage ex-members to rejoin the unions. It was these proposals by the Austin management, to intensify the speed-up of labour on the reorganised flow line production, that abruptly stemmed workplace apathy and indifference. But leadership and action, when it came, arose largely outside the scope of trade union influence. It came directly from among the unorganised rank and file.

A meeting in January 1929, attended by 250 workers who were mainly trade unionists, and addressed by local trade union officials, considered what action ought to be taken over the Austin managements intention to introduce new conditions. The view was presented that,

owing to the weak state of organisation, it would be "...impossible to take any drastic action with the firm".⁵¹ The meeting decided that the union officials should approach management with the objective of gaining the most favourable terms possible and then set about establishing organisation among those employed. It appears that recruitment of workers did increase. The A E U could claim in January,

"Several hundreds becoming members of our society during the past few weeks".⁵²

Though union officials achieved a degree of success in increasing the membership of their unions, they were not as effective in preventing the installation of the new working arrangements. Furthermore, the plant still remained largely unorganised; vast sections of semi skilled workers being without representation through the lengthy period in which the changes were being implemented. Inevitable grievances occurred across the plant, yet the vast majority of workers were prepared to be outside the unions. In April, this simmering discontent boiled over. Management had posted a notice which stated that any employee who lost time would have to report to the labour bureau, who would advise when a starting date could be set. A loss of time and earnings would ensue. The placing of the notice appeared as the final straw. A mass meeting, comprised mainly of non-union labour, was called for the lunch break.⁵³ Management withdrew the notice, but knowledge of this did not reach the mass meeting, instead a strike was called and a strike committee formed. The new working conditions became the main issue.

5,000 of the 11,000 workforce stopped on the 25 March, the remaining 6,000 became laid off. The entire factory came to a standstill for the first time since the end of the war. The strikers were almost

entirely non-unionists. Their committee functioned outside the influence of the established unions in the plant. The strikers, without the organised protection of a union organisation, lacked the experience of running a strike, and aware of their vulnerability to dismissal and replacement arising from the state of the labour market, initially adopted the tactic of the "stay in strike" as a means of protecting their jobs as well as a pressure for improved conditions.

On the 1 April a statement issued on behalf of all the unions with memberships at Longbridge, while accepting that genuine grievances existed, called for a return to work on the assurances given by the Employers Association that discussions could take place.

"In such negotiations", the statement claimed, "arrangements will be made to ensure representation from the workers in the departments concerned".⁵⁴

The policy of the management, in regard to those on strike, was quite firm. In no circumstances would they recognise or negotiate with the Strike Committee. The Strike Committee, on the other hand, representing the large body of unorganised workers, rejected the representation of the trade union officials, who had no membership among those in dispute. Rejecting the union leaderships assurances, the unorganised workers were more fearful of the conditions which management would extract over a return to work. On 3 April, the Strike Committee stated that they had not entirely ignored the position of the union officials. Addressing a mass meeting, the chairman of the committee, claimed,

"....they must not interfere until they are asked to do so.... if we went back we would be returning like beaten dogs ready to accept the crumbs that were thrown to them".⁵⁵

Managements policy of "open shop", through discouraging organised trade union activity, created circumstances within which the power of mass resentment of workers could emerge outside developed channels of communication between worker and management organisations. The Austin managements dealings with trade unions were confined to the craft unions, with discussions being held through local union officials. No shop floor organisation existed, though on occasion a shop member of a craft union might be called upon to report to his local official for the purposes of making approaches to management.

The majority of unions represented in the plant, recruited workers within their own trades. A E U Brass and Metal Makers Society, United Pattern Makers Society, Foundry Workers Union, and the Vehicle Builders, all derived from a craft heritage. Union membership was based upon a small section of the workforce and confined to particular parts of the plant. Semi skilled workers who did work in skilled sections remained unorganised. A nominal presence in Longbridge was held by the Workers Union but its membership had declined sharply. Recruitment policies among the craft unions ignored the position of the less skilled, although the rapid growth in semi skilled labour at Longbridge in the late 1920s following the introduction of flow line technology was attracting migrant labour from regions beyond the Midlands.⁵⁶

Much of this labour was not without a prior experience of unionism. The chairman of the strike committee, Ted Bowen, had formally been a miner in South Wales, and had only been employed at Austins for six months before the strike.⁵⁷

The strike soon reached deadlock. Management refused to negotiate with the strikers but would, as they already had, enter into discussion with union officials. The union officials did not represent the unorganised strikers, while the strikers refused to allow union officials to act upon their behalf. Having abandoned occupation of the plant over the Easter weekend, a test of will emerged. Management reopened the plant but hardened its attitude towards those in dispute. It declared that those who had not returned to work would be considered dismissed.⁵⁸ The dispute placed considerable pressure upon the strike leadership. A large proportion of strikers clocked in but immediately left work to join the meeting of those still out. The decision was to continue the strike but to try and start discussions with management. This was refused. The question now became one of recognition for the workplace committee of the unorganised workforce. The strategy adopted by the Austin management towards the mass protest was that no interview or discussion surrounding the grievances could take place before a complete return to work. Only then would they be willing to receive a deputation. No recognition would be made of the unofficial strike committee. The chairman of the strike committee argued for the mass meeting to resist those management terms.

The following day the strike began to collapse. A policy of admission to the works was introduced, only for those workers in possession of an entrance card, available from foremen and superintendents. Those not in receipt of such cards would be deemed to be self dismissed, and left to the mercy of the labour market. They would have to reapply for employment. Long queues of workers awaiting the distribution of admission cards demoralised the remaining strikers. Now only 1,500 appeared to stand by the strike committee.⁵⁹

It was losing the base of its authority to lead. A vote taken among the workers still loyal to the committee called off the dispute, and elected a delegation from among the body of the meeting to meet the management. The unofficial committee relinquished its leadership.

The ten day dispute, demonstrated the susceptibility of integrated flow line production. It illustrated the power it bestowed upon semi skilled labour. The strike however proved a failure for the spontaneous organisation which emerged among the non unionised workers. Without the resources to endure a strike, lacking experience in organisation and collective regulation, the strike crumbled, through an absence of funds and managements insistence that the strike committee had to accept a defeat before discussions could begin on grievances with new rates. This management victory was in part a hollow one. "For the first time they saw the spectre of mass protest among the semi skilled. Production of 1,000 cars had been lost,⁶⁰ the factory had had to close down. The real victors to emerge from the situation were however, the trade unions, despite their lack of enthusiasm towards a strike. Not only did they make gains in membership but were able to point to the failures of protest among unorganised workers. It was the trade union officials who were to be party to discussions with the Austin management and the local employers association, for establishing a procedure to resolve the grievances. The management, when faced with the exercise of power from an organisation based upon the workplace, preferred to deal through established trade unions in procedure.

The negotiations produced a number of concessions, some of which were to have long term consequences for workplace relations. At the first meeting, trade union officials and representatives from the shop floor, met with management and the chairman of the Employers Association. They agreed to set up a small committee which would consist of the trade union officials, plus four men and one woman from the workshops. This Committee would conduct the negotiations and then present a recommendation to the wider body of shop floor representatives for approval. At the end of the negotiations, the workers representatives had succeeded in getting the basis of the new grading system abolished. It would be replaced by the recognition, on the part of management, that mutuality should be the principle for determining piecework rates. Piecework times would be set upon the basic rate and an increase in the basic rate would be paid to women workers.⁶¹ The firm gave an undertaking to carry out the operation of the 1922 shop stewards agreement. These terms were accepted by the full body of worker delegates; the final agreement being signed by Engelbach on behalf of the company and nine workers on behalf of the labour force. Names of individual unions did not appear upon the document. The workers signature, which included the strike leader Bowen, were in the name of

'The Committee of Workers and Representatives:
appointed by the General Conference'⁶²

This many sided dispute was the first occasion when a mass centre of semi skilled workers in the motor industry confronted management. Although the Strike Committee, which sprang up from amongst the predominantly unorganised workers, acted independently of the limited but nevertheless existing union organisations, it had to disband itself before grievances could be discussed. The Austin management

resorted to procedure to handle the aftermath of the dispute. The real outcome of the strike was the acceptance on the part of management, to operate national agreements on mutuality for piecework prices, and recognition of elected shop stewards in their plant. The absence of organisation among the less skilled, had meant that the nominal minimum national agreement on regulating relations with workers were not being met. The agreement on piecework prices survived for forty years.⁶³ It shaped, for almost two generations, the most significant issue in workplace industrial relations, piecework bargaining, but the continued weaknesses in union membership undermined the status of shop stewards until the post second world war period.

Arising out of the undertaking by the firm to operate the shop stewards agreement the workers committee set up a special body to ensure that union stewards were elected in various departments of the plant.⁶⁴ Within a month, shop stewards were entering into discussions with management and were accompanying officials to works conferences. The opposition to new rates had paved the way for recognition of shop stewards, a base, to the unions, for increased recruitment and more effective organisation. Out of the agreement, semi skilled earnings increased, membership of unions improved, but management attitude towards trade unionism did not relinquish. Although the firm did not oppose workers joining trade unions, they would not allow the holding of meetings in their workshops during meal breaks, though they did permit the use of a room once a week for stewards to meet in, outside the works time.⁶⁵

The stewards were being brought into questions concerning anomalies in rates, they were attempting to gain consideration for the

application of seniority in the selection of workers for seasonal lay off.⁶⁶ Within two months of the April agreement, the seasonal rundown in production had begun. Several shop stewards were being discharged.⁶⁷ The loss of full rated jobs was being covered by the use of semi skilled workers.⁶⁸ In the following year, 1930, average monthly unemployment in the industry doubled. In 1931 and 1932 it had trebled.⁶⁹ The registered unemployed in Birmingham rose from 25,000 in 1927, to 61,522 by the beginning of 1931. Allegations about unfair treatment of stewards and active trade union members increased.⁷⁰ In May, the Engineering Union was reporting upon the refusal of the Austin management to reconsider their decision of dismissing a member who had been involved in the dispute. The gains in organisation were being erased, unemployment was breaking up workplace organisation in the Austin. The ad hoc Workers Committee, comprising a body of delegates from various departments at Longbridge, arose to handle the outcomes of the strike, but was largely representative of non union semi skilled labour. It did not materialise into a permanent workplace organisation. Shop steward appointments, under the jurisdiction of the trade unions, were confined to the craft unions. Without a significant growth in trade unionism among the semi skilled, the development of a permanent shop stewards committee remained spurious. Seasonal lay offs and a high annual level of unemployment discouraged increases in membership.

In November 1936, there again arose widespread opposition to management policies to lower rates and reduce income. The strike again occurred spontaneously and spread rapidly among non union labour. As management began to adjust rates on the new models, the Austin Ten and Austin Twelve, 58 workers in the body section

struck. They walked round the works calling out other workers. 5,500 workers, the whole of the West Works came out. Virtually all were non unionists, and a large proportion of them were women workers.⁷¹ The dispute was without an identifiable leadership. There was no strike committee and the issue took place in isolation from similar grievances concerning the lowering of rates, which were being taken up independently by individual unions on behalf of their membership.⁷² It was again the non union labour which stopped the factory.

The 1936 strike highlighted the limited influence the trade union possessed at Longbridge. It was the local members of the Communist Party who leafleted the strikers and stressed the urgent need for the election of a Strike Committee, the appointment of pickets and the co-operation of the trade unions.⁷³ The strike resulted in management being willing to discuss grievances once a return to work had taken place, but further illustrated the limitations in workplace organisation. At a meeting addressed by trade union officials, the impatience at the low level of trade union membership resulted in criticism of the action of the strikers.⁷⁴ No joint approach, however, was made among the unions over the dispute. Individual unions used the situation to recruit members, and called their own separate meetings for this purpose.⁷⁵ Out of the strike, the Transport and General Workers began to recruit the semi skilled from Austin, but the limitation of union membership,⁷⁶ weakness in workplace organisation, and a reliance upon the spontaneous enthusiasm of non union labour to oppose managerial policies were again revealed as the basic form within which workplace power was being exercised at Austin.

These general characteristics of workplace relations at the Austin

in Birmingham were even more evident in the origins of shop floor protest in Oxford. The Morris plants in Oxford combined the most advanced levels of mass production technology of the British owned car firms, with the lowest levels of trade union influence among its workforce. Unlike Herbert Austin, William Morris was not a member of the Engineering Employers Federation. Not only was he not party to national engineering agreements on wages and conditions, but was under no obligation to operate procedural clauses arising from the 1922 lockout, governing relations with trade unions. Though he was the largest manufacturer of cars during the inter war period, he had, unlike Austin, no involvement with the Mond-Turner talks, which attempted to restructure industrial relations in the aftermath of the General Strike. These talks were aiming for a more conciliatory approach between employers and unions on questions of rationalisation, productivity, and industrial relations, and had received a significant level of support from employers in the new industries.⁷⁷ Morris was, however, a founding and active members of The League of Industry. In 1933, it was claimed that the League had some 600 members at the Pressed Steel in Oxford, many of whom were charge-hands and foremen, but a significant number were shop floor workers.⁷⁸ The high commitment to rapid technological change co-existed with firm opposition to trade unionism, which Morris probably associated with the activity of craft unionism. In July 1927 the Oxford Times quoted Morris as saying,

"I have no particular reverence for tradition - especially for industrial traditions. I never allow trade unions to interfere with me".⁷⁹

In his extensive dealings in philanthropy, in 1934 he gave £30,000 towards the creation of an unemployed camp.

Morris, more than any other of the early British motor pioneers, had been strongly influenced by American mass production technology. Along with his engine plant in Coventry, the opening of the Pressed Steel plant at Oxford, in 1926, was built in line with the latest American engineering development.⁸⁰ Although it employed the largest proportion of skilled workers in the Oxford factories, this amounted to just under 300 workers or not much more than 15% of the total workforce.⁸¹ While the A E U and N U V B had members in the plant, only the Patternmakers had any formal agreements with management. The semi skilled workers were without organisation until the 1934 strike.

Before 1934 the piecework prices were set by the foremen, but there was no guaranteed payment; weekly earnings fluctuated sharply. Under the application of the Bedaux⁸² wage system which operated at Pressed Steel, the semi skilled piecework bonuses were based upon the output of each line of track.⁸³ This effectively pooled the outcome of individual effort. The setting of individual prices influenced the level of output and bonus payments for the whole department engaged upon a particular track. This payments system encouraged group cohesiveness.⁸⁴ The establishment of an individual price became the concern of all workers in the department as it influenced the line bonus. This pool bonus, provided the basis of collective interest among the workforce.⁸⁵

Prior to the strike, however, trade unionism generally in Oxford remained particularly weak. The A E U membership increased from only 36 to 68 between 1928 and 1934.⁸⁶ This was confined to the skilled toolroom sections.⁸⁷ During the early part of the 1930s, the Vehicle Builders had only 50 members in the town, while the T G W U possessed

about 30 members.⁸⁸ In 1934, Morris Motors alone were employing 5,000 workers. A further 1,000 were employed at Morris Radiators, with another 3,000 at Pressed Steel.⁸⁹

Morris utilisation of modern production methods combined with a labour relations policy which discouraged the development of trade unionism in his plants. He argued,

"To keep costs down you must have a staff of workers who are interested. My experience is that if you look after your men, they will look after you. A low wage policy is the most expensive way of producing. A moderately high wage is the cheapest."⁹⁰

Morris's maximum use of mass production enabled him to employ the maximum use of semi skilled labour. He was able to reduce his dependence upon craft labour and craft rates, but paid above the trade union rate for semi skilled labour. This policy of high earnings for less skilled workers, weakened the cause of trade unionism in the inter war period. The earnings were the outcome of tying virtually the whole workforce to a graded bonus system.⁹¹ The effects of Morris's production methods at the Cowley plant, saw an increase in yearly car production from 33,000 in 1924, to 58,000 by 1934. This increase was brought about through a reduction in the labour force from 5,500 to 5,000 workers.⁹² At the Cowley assembly plant and the Pressed Steel works, group incentive schemes operated. In the Radiator plant, the more fragmented working arrangements led to a more individualised bonus scheme.⁹³

Although Morris held personal views opposing trade unionism, he managed the organisation of the company in such a way that he was virtually able to stave off trade unions activity by an incentive scheme, which yielded high levels of productivity from which he

could pay above union rates for low priced, lesser skilled labour. His investment in flow production enabled the employment of unskilled agricultural and local labour on assembly lines, despite their lack of factory experience. This indigenous rural labour was, in the main, drawn from the surrounding villages, where regular contact with trade unionism was an unlikely occurrence.

The growth of the motor industry in the 1920s however, began to exhaust these local supplies of labour.⁹⁴ By 1936, 46.3% of the 10,453 employees working in the Oxford car factories were immigrant workers.⁹⁵ The industry's expansion was the single most important reason for the rapid growth in population in Oxford.⁹⁶ Between 1921 and 1931, Oxford became the third fastest growing conurbation, as its population increased by one fifth. A fifth of immigrants came from the surrounding villages. The rest were drawn from Wales, the South West, London, the North East and Scotland.⁹⁷ This influx of labour was drawn from occupations other than agriculture. Their traditions and expectations were removed from rural Oxfordshire. Many were not without trade union influence.

This industrialisation of Oxford, developed later than that of Birmingham or Coventry. The transformation from a "university city and market town", attracted labour beyond the immediate area, yet union organisation was slow to respond. It was not until strikes occurred, that the A E U branch became aware of the number of its members in the motor industry.⁹⁸ Owing to seasonal working, many members arriving in Oxford were not transferring their branch membership. The Transport and General Workers Union did not begin to recruit workers until the first big strike at Pressed Steel in July 1934.⁹⁹

While a major obstacle to trade unionism lay in management opposition, the combination of migrant labour and arduous working conditions, within the intensive mass production technology, were the basis for the exercise of collective opposition. It was at the Pressed Steel plant, that these factors were most apparent. Of the Morris plants in the Oxford area, the Pressed Steel factory had the reputation for poorest working conditions and highest accident rates.¹⁰⁰ It employed the largest proportion of workers attracted to Oxford by employment prospects. The Cowley assembly plant, by contrast, employed more local labour, possessed cleaner, lighter working conditions and a lower wage rate. No industrial dispute was recorded in the Morris car plants at Cowley, or the MG plant at Abingdon during the inter war period. Occasional stoppages were not unknown in the Radiator plant, but did not stem from trade unionism.¹⁰¹ The highly individualistic basis of the piecework system discouraged group interests. It was the Pressed Steel plant, with its high levels of integrated flow line production and application of the Bedaux incentive payments system, which gave rise to the first widespread stoppages of semi skilled and non skilled labour in Oxford.

During the heatwave in July 1934, the unpleasantness of actual working conditions coincided with managerial attempts to alter rates. Workers in the Press Shop found that following a full weeks work they received less wages. A stoppage during the shift was resolved by the promise of a meeting the following morning to discuss the questions. On the Saturday, 14 July, the management refused to meet Press Shop delegates.¹⁰² A meeting therefore took place between the night and day shift workers in the Press Shop, who decided to strike from the Monday night. The original issue quickly became transformed into grievances relating to workers across the works,

as the decision to strike spread.

On the Monday the dayshift struck. Two hours after the morning shift started, the girls employed in the Press Shop came out and led a demonstration into the town.¹⁰³ The following day the strike extended. By the afternoon, some 700 workers had stopped including the shears department, assembly floor, sander section, chassis shop, refrigerators, and some of the machinists. A mass meeting of this non-union labour elected a Strike Committee.¹⁰⁴ Lacking in organisational experience, a broad based Council of Action was formed from organisations in Oxford, to help spread support for the strikers.¹⁰⁵ This Council of Action contained 6 members of the Trades Council, 6 from the Oxford Solidarity Committee, which organised unemployment marches, and 6 strikers. The Labour Party was to later have representation on the Council of Action.

The importance of the Council of Action lay, not only in its spreading knowledge of the dispute organising financial support, but in its role of encouraging sympathy among the unemployed, the workers on short-time in Oxford, and the publishing of a daily strike bulletin to keep the strikers informed of the changing circumstances.¹⁰⁶ The momentum of the dispute was generated by the semi skilled pieceworkers. The skilled workers, including those with union membership, were much more uncertain in their support of the strike. Members of the A E U were ordered by their District Committee to stay at work pending a national instruction, while the Pattern Makers' officials argued against their members striking because of the existence of management recognition and agreements with the union. The electricians left safety men in the plant but were threatening to withdraw, them if black leg labour was used. Large scale picketing

of the plant took place, but although the usual buses were able to get into the plant, few workers were in them.¹⁰⁷

The semi skilled workers began to appreciate the power of their position. Not only had they succeeded to virtually close down production at Pressed Steel, but the loss of body frames which were being produced for Austin, Vauxhall, Wolseley, Hillman and Ford, as well as Morris cars, threatened to eventually paralyse large sections of the motor industry.¹⁰⁸ The dispute could not be confined to the internal consequences of Pressed Steel. The preservation of customer credibility, within a highly competitive product market was a major factor in management strategy in confronting its workforce. During the first week, however, it adopted an uncompromising line. The basis of the A E U independent position lay in its separate claim for increases in skilled rates. An A E U delegation met with management who tried to delay discussing the issue. A shop meeting voted to strike but before they could do so the management had decided to close the shop.¹⁰⁹ Although they must have felt there was little point in continuing to employ workers, be it trade unionists, when the rest of production had come to a standstill, the effect of the decision was for the A E U members to accept that they were being locked out. Meanwhile, pending the return of the Patternmakers full-time official to Birmingham, the remaining group of workers still in attendance at the works, decided to refrain from crossing the picket lines.¹¹⁰

The behaviour of the craft unions did little to enhance their position in the eyes of the unorganised semi skilled workers. It was managerial action, rather than trade union principles, which created an enforced solidarity among the workforce. A reluctance to break with procedure among the recognised craft workers was, a point

of departure in opposition to management authority. The semi skilled were not constrained by such considerations. In these circumstances it was far easier for a militant influence to emerge in the leadership of the strike. It was the constructed Council of Action, possessing as it did, significant Communist Party influence, which was able to give early direction for the strike.

The Oxford Communist Party was not particularly large, and there were no Party members employed at Pressed Steel.¹¹¹ Their membership was drawn from Ruskin College students, and a few organisers of the unemployed marches which passed through Oxford from South Wales. They were, however, able to arrange for Abe Lazarus who had played a prominent part in a strike at the Firestone Tyre Plant in London, to come to Oxford and address the strikers. He convinced the Strike Committee on the need for trade union organisation, but stressed that the control of the strike should be with the Committee. The demand for workplace recognition and control was expressed in a strike bulletin,

"No-one negotiates but the Strike Committee....
no-one on the Strike Committee but the strikers." ¹¹²

The limitations of this position were to become apparent. Meanwhile, the Strike Committee had established a package of ambitious demands, which included the question of trade union representation.

- 1 Abolition of all piecework
- 2 1s 6d flat rate bonus for all departments.
- 3 No victimisation.
- 4 100% trade unionism and trade union recognition.¹¹³

The strike had abated the antipathy towards trade unions.

Representation and recognition had become major demands by the semi skilled. A T G W U organiser was brought to Oxford.¹¹⁴ On the third day of the strike 500 workers were said to have enrolled in the union.¹¹⁵ However, not only had the issue in dispute been transformed, but the controlling influence over the strike was changing. The previously unorganised strike committee possessed little experience in organisation and negotiation. These conditions had enabled the experience of Lazarus, who became known as 'Bill Firestone' to encourage an effective organisation of the strike. Apart from picketing, speakers were sent to other car plants to win their support and prevent the transference of jigs and fixtures for possible chassis and car body assembly,¹¹⁶ while railway workers were requested not to touch 'blackened' work.

Materially, the strike was supported by the T G W U who gave £300 for payment in benefits. The Trades Council provided over £150, while the Strike Committee itself managed to raise £100. Management, seeking a resolution of the conflict, agreed to negotiate with the Strike Committee, on the basis of a return to work on conditions which had existed prior to the strike. A mass meeting, attended by some 3,000 workers, rejected this offer and insisted upon the four strike demands as forming the basis for an ending of the strike. This point indicates a clear break from the workforces attitudes to its immediate past. Addressing the mass meeting, the T G W U organiser Geoby, highlighted the workplace rejection of paternalism,

"It is not a question of joining some league organised by the management so that we could co-operate. It is a question of building our own organisation controlled by the working class in the interest of the working class. This we had already shown our determination to do so by joining up in our hundreds in the trade unions".¹¹⁷

By the second week of the strike, the influence of trade union organisations had began to show. The scale of activity undertaken was unimaginable among the mass of unorganised workers.

On the 28 July, Pressed Steel Co. joined the E E F. This action shaped the resolution of the dispute and paved the way for trade union recognition. Resolution of the strike when it came, was brought about through negotiations in London between management and national trade union officials. The negotiating experience of the trade union officers could not be denied. The limited organisational role of the strike committee was apparent, yet it did not immediately accede to the recommendations of the union officials.¹¹⁸ No agreement had been reached on the original strike issue, the reduction in earnings. What was being offered was a framework by which grievances could be resolved - the managerial functions agreement. Recognition of trade unions and shop stewards would be granted but the company publically stated its policy would be one of maintaining an "open shop".¹¹⁹ An undertaking to consider the introduction of a guarantee price, and an acknowledgement of no victimisation were given.

A mass meeting endorsed the agreement which eventually had the support of the Strike Committee. The meeting elected shop stewards and a works committee.¹²⁰ The two week dispute was the first major triumph in organisation for semi skilled workers in the motor industry. On a return to work the following day, shop committees were elected and a J S S C formed between the A E U., T G W U and Patternmakers union.¹²¹ No formal agreement was reached with management for a closed shop, but by 1936, over 100 shop stewards existed in the plant and every section of workers had shop steward representation.¹²²

Shop stewards were being brought into piecework negotiations. Management began to allow branch secretaries employed in the works to act as convenors for the semi skilled. They were able to gain easy access to higher management. This encouraged the resolution of grievances outside delayed processes of the Disputes Procedure.

In the recession of 1938, the Pressed Steel management tried to curb the level of workplace organisation. As the firm made a number of steel bodies for a variety of models produced by Austin, Morris, Standard and Ford, regular changes in production and working arrangements took place. With strong shop committees undertaking piecework negotiations, the management increasingly sought to confine shop stewards role to the formal requirements of procedure.

Supervisors began to prevent inter shop contact among shop stewards. The branch officials lost the right to access to higher management.¹²³ During the autumn, the Pressed Steel management were introducing reductions in piecework prices, in a period of increased unemployment.¹²⁴ A convenor was sacked for not being in his own department.¹²⁵ An unofficial dispute took place, but did not receive the official support of the T G W U, as it was activity outside the operation of procedure.¹²⁶ Management warned that those on strike would be dismissed. A return to work took place but 12 workers, including two shop stewards - Len Barker and Norman Brown, were not re-engaged.¹²⁷ The Pressed Steel management were asserting control over the workplace organisation through dismissal and containment, in a period of decline in the market for labour.

Trade union membership in the motor industry began to expand during the second half of the 1930s. Significantly, this development had followed reorganisation of production upon flow line principles

among the large manufacturers. Between 1928 and 1934, Austin, Morris, Humber, Standard, Armstrong Siddeley, Jaguar, Ford and Vauxhall had all invested in mass production techniques. The expansion in output was undertaken by a smaller group of large manufacturers adopting production processes, which would facilitate the employment of a larger force of semi skilled workers than had been the case during the 1920s. The Pressed Steel plant at Oxford, despite the offensive by the management, remained the most effectively organised union factory in the motor industry until the second world war, but Coventry became the town where employment and trade unionism were reviving upon a much wider basis.

In Coventry, the increase in trade in the motor industry was accompanied by a growth in the towns general and electrical engineering industries.¹²⁸ After 1936, however, under the chairmanship of Lord Austin, the major Midland motor manufacturers - Austin, Rover, Standard, Rootes and Daimler, undertook the construction of 'shadow factories' in the West Midlands for the assembly of aero-engines.¹²⁹ This involvement by the motor industry in the rearmament programme, strengthened the market position of labour. The building of three of these factories in Coventry, by Daimler, Rootes and Standard, increased the towns dependence upon vehicle technology and rapidly expanded employment opportunities. Between 1935 and 1938, Coventry became the fastest growing Midland town, employment in the motor industry grew by over 20%.¹³⁰ This boom was met by an influx in immigrant labour, much of it from the traditional industrial areas. The semi skilled nature of much of the employment in these new factories attracted labour from the mining areas of South Wales, the cotton towns of Lancashire, the engineering centres of Clydeside, in addition to workers from Greater

London and Tyneside.¹³¹ Employment in motor vehicles, cycles and aircraft increased from 34,550 to 41,800 between 1935 and 1939.¹³² Just under 90% were male workers, of whom a large proportion were among the younger age groups.¹³³ Immigrant labour accounted for 29% of the total Coventry workforce by 1939.¹³⁴ The pre-war boom expanded the population of the city by over 40,000 between 1931 and 1939.¹³⁵

This economic boom was favourable to the growth of trade unionism. The A E U increased its membership fourfold in six years. It increasingly sought to recruit lesser rated workers in an attempt to organise the sharp rise in semi skilled workers.¹³⁶ By 1939 the T G W U were opening 3 branches in Coventry.¹³⁷ From the mid 1930s, shop stewards began to re-emerge in Coventry factories. Sparsely distributed, they were being elected in a number of motor plants. After 1934, shop stewards appeared in Riley, Daimler, Armstrong Siddeley, and Humber. In 1938, there were stewards at Standard and Morris Engines. At Riley and Humber, the shop stewards had gained recognition from management.¹³⁸

The Coventry Trades Council had originally organised campaigns to increase trade union membership but as more workers began to join, the individual unions undertook their own recruitment. In the motor industry, an absence of workplace recognition plus the presence of considerable sections of non union labour, in addition to an uneven distribution of shop stewards across the various plant, discouraged any tendency towards shop steward organisational independence.¹³⁹ Contact external to the workplace among shop stewards, tended to rely upon attendance at local branches and committees of their trade union organisations.¹⁴⁰ It was in the aircraft industry, rather than

the motor industry, in Coventry, that a broader organisational network between shop stewards existed, beyond the constitutional trade union structures and employer organisations.

Employment in the aircraft industry was not as seasonal as it had been in the motor industry. Owing to the finer accuracy in construction and the reduced opportunities for mass production techniques, when compared to the assembly of motor cars, aircraft depended upon a greater proportion of highly skilled labour. A wave of strikes had taken place in many of the main centres of aircraft production in opposition to management policies to introduce wholesale changes in working practices, wages and conditions. A rank and file organisation, the Aircraft Shop Stewards National Council (NSSNC), operated across the major factories in the industry.¹⁴¹ A newspaper, *New Propeller*, was produced monthly, and regular meetings enabled stewards from Rolls Royce, De Havilland, Fairley, and Whitehead Torpedo, to be informed of employers activities throughout the geographically dispersed industry.

In Coventry, it was at Armstrong Whitworth Aviation (AWA), that a shop steward organisation arose which possessed a degree of independence from local trade union authority and which sustained a rank and file contact, through shop steward representatives, with those other factories. The scale of employment in aircraft factories, the large proportion of skilled workers and the organisation of labour into large gangs at AWA, encouraged trade union membership. In 1939, 6,000 workers were employed at AWA. This had risen to 10,000 by 1944. By 1938, trade union influence was firmly established at AWA. The ganger was being elected from the workgroups, resulting in an increasing number of gangers being drawn from among

shop stewards.¹⁴² Shop stewards, in their role as elected ganger, were having considerable influence upon the organisation of work. In addition to this supervisory capacity, the gang system strengthened the representative activities of the shop steward which created a basis for organisational independence.

The distribution of workers into large gangs at AWA, divided the workforce into groups based around common areas of work. This division of workers around production, rather than their individual trades, meant that the shop stewards were elected from gangs rather than individual trade union organisations. The large gangs were in a stronger position to make up the loss of shop stewards earnings, incurred in carrying out negotiations or attending meetings on behalf of members of the gang. Gang working strengthened workplace representation. The election from individual gangs, as opposed to election from individual trade unions, encouraged a degree of independence from their local trade union organisations. The soundness of AWA financial arrangements permitted 6 delegates to attend the regular meetings of the ASSNC.¹⁴³ AWA shop stewards committees from the Baginton Whitley and Parkside factories held a monthly meeting between their respective JSSCs in a room of a Coventry pub.¹⁴⁴

This, the most effective level of organisational contact among shop stewards in Coventry achieved by 1938, was far removed from the circumstances prevailing in the shadow factories. These factories were built with the intention of maximising the use of semi skilled labour and mass production techniques.¹⁴⁵ It was to these plants that a large proportion of migrant labour had come.¹⁴⁶

During 1938, a series of disputes arose in the Rover, Rootes and Austin shadow factories, over management policy to impose motor industry conditions and rates. The strikes which took place were some of the largest strikes in the 1930s, they resulted in a series of successes for workplace organisation and became a stimulus to widespread growth in trade union organisation among all classes of labour.

A short strike by non union workers in February had successfully prevented the reduction of bonus earnings for a group of workers at the Rover shadow factory in Birmingham. When two months later, management began to introduce time and motion studies to determine piece rates, 1,500 workers struck against what they viewed as motor industry techniques.¹⁴⁷ The seven day April strike was supported by the ASSNC.¹⁴⁸ It attracted widespread publicity and drew attention to the weak state of organisation among those sections of workers.¹⁴⁹ Over 500 Rover workers had joined the AEU at the beginning of the dispute, but the Strike Committee set up spread the issue to other shadow factories. They addressed well attended mass meetings in the four Coventry factories, where a levy on workers was organised to provide financial support.¹⁵⁰ At the Austin shadow plant in Birmingham, almost half the 6,000 workforce attended the mass meeting addressed by Rover strikers.¹⁵¹ These expressions of support appear to have encouraged the Rover management to compromise. They withdrew attempts to introduce unilateral changes. No change in rates was to occur without full negotiations with trade union officials.¹⁵²

This outcome strengthened trade union identification among the workers, the majority of which were reported to have become organised

during the strike. At the Rootes shadow factory in Coventry, the management had refused two requests for works conferences over rates for inspectors. 52 were locked out. The weakness of trade unionism in the plant can be observed by their response. They considered raising the dispute in the House of Commons but within three days the majority of those locked out had returned on employers terms.¹⁵³ The shop stewards did not appear to be in a position to support the inspectors positions. They did, however, produce a lock-out bulletin setting out their case. This was sold in the other Coventry shadow factories.¹⁵⁴

The inspiration of the Rover workers approach in publicising their dispute to other shadow factories, was not lost upon the Rootes inspectors, but the overall weakness of organisation in the plant isolated their dispute. The experience of the Rover strike was not entirely forgotten. On the 9 June, the chairman of the Austin shadow shop stewards committee was sacked, along with a shop floor worker, for refusing to accept time study for the determining of rates. The 870 workers in the department walked out immediately and a shop stewards meeting called resolved to call out the whole of the workforce if there was no reinstatement of the two in 24 hours.¹⁵⁵ The Austin management gave way and avoided a major confrontation. The chairman of the shop stewards committee was also the delegate to the ASSNC. The sacked workers were reinstated, while rate fixes and time study engineers were withdrawn.¹⁵⁶

In August, the largest dispute of the period took place at the Austin shadow factory. Throughout the year, the question of rates being paid to workers in the shadow factories had been a constant source of discontent. The skilled workers were being paid a basic of 34s.

compared to 46s. in the aircraft industry. The employers with a history in the motor industry, were applying motor industry values, but the different standards of work meant that even semi skilled workers on motor industry rates were never able, in the shadow factories, to achieve the same gross earnings as those in the motor industry. The nature of work on aircraft differed from that in the motor industry. What had changed during 1938, was the increasing level of trade union organisation in the shadow factories.

The Austin possessed the largest shadow factory. By the autumn of 1938, it had established a JSSC which comprised of stewards from the BSMW, NSMW, AEU, TGWU, NUUB, B & MM, plus the Coppersmiths, Patternmakers, and Woodworkers Machinists unions. Its senior officials were delegates to the ASSNC.¹⁵⁷ The strikers' demands were for the full skilled rate for all adult workers. They were also demanding that management only recruit union labour.¹⁵⁸

The nine day strike was for a general rate for the whole factory. The 6,000 strikers were even supported by indirect workers in the stores and 20 boys.¹⁵⁹ A management offer of a 36s. basic rate for the semi skilled and 40s. to the craft sections was rejected.

The Strike Committee adopted the Rover principle of wide publicity of the dispute in the Coventry shadow factories. Three mass meetings were held in Coventry, and a Strike Bulletin had a circulation of over 12,000 among Coventry workers.¹⁶⁰ A special meeting organised by the ASSNC took place among Coventry aircraft workers.¹⁶¹ Financial support for the Austin came from the major

aircraft centres of Fairley, Hawker, De Havilland, Daimler and Halliwells.¹⁶² Support for the dispute even emerged from the Austin Motor Company, a mass meeting being called to discuss its implications.

The outcome of the dispute did not achieve the full skilled rate for all adult workers, but the demand for only trade union labour to be employed, and the unity of the workforce, plus the organisational activity of the Joint Shop Stewards Committee, were clear reflections on the rapid transformations taking place in centres of predominantly semi skilled labour. The level of trade union organisation at the Austin shadow factory, prior to the second world war, was on the verge of 100% membership.¹⁶³ The revitalisation of industrial activity was creating considerable tensions. The increasing piecework rates of the lower grade workers in the highly mechanised plants, often resulted in their earnings being above those of the higher rated skilled worker. In November, the toolroom workers at Rootes shadow plant in Coventry struck, against attempts to dismiss higher rated workers who were earning less than the lower rated pieceworker. Even this action, by only 68 workers, was supported by the semi skilled workers.¹⁶⁴ These challenges to the power of management in the workplace during the second half of the 1930s, corresponded with increasing stability in employment, which had accompanied an improvement in trade, and also a revival in both trade union membership and workplace organisation.

In Birmingham, for example, it was the Trades Council, rather than the actions of individual unions, which became the central focus for annual campaigns to increase trade union membership across the entire city. The progressive response to these activities discloses the change from unorganised power conflict towards organised wage labour in Birmingham. Following what was described in the Trades Council report as a successful conference exposing the effects of the Bedaux payments system in the City's industry, the Council reported in 1934 on its most important week of its campaign held

between 10 and 16 September, or just prior to new car model production.¹⁶⁵ The Town Crier, also reported the campaign resulting in,

"One of the most important gatherings which the Birmingham labour movement has organised for many years." ¹⁶⁶

The cause of the recruitment campaign involved a series of mid-day meetings outside factory gates and workshops. It had included 15,000 individual letters to lapsed members and the distribution of 70,000 copies of recruitment literature. In 1936, within a few days of that year's week . campaign, 470 new members were claimed to have joined the union.¹⁶⁷ Substantial improvements began to be recorded

in wages and conditions. Among the craft unions, the Patternmakers were claiming 100% organisation in a number of workshops in 1937, in addition to increases of 12s. a week in wages.¹⁶⁸ Employers were beginning to contact the Woodcutting machinists union for union labour, while the Vehicle Builders had achieved the abolition of the town's grading structure, and had gained improvements on the higher national rates, which had replaced it. Membership increased by 1,200.¹⁶⁹ The Brass and Metal Mechanics were reporting sharp increases in membership, particularly among younger workers, following the restoration of the rate. Unemployment in Birmingham, in December 1936, had fallen to 15,742, compared to 57,662 for the corresponding date for 1931,¹⁷⁰ although it did begin to increase during 1938. In 1937, the ETU opened 6 new branches in the city while the AEU reported an increase of 2,000 members. Of unions with memberships in the motor industry, the 1930s saw a rapid spread in unionisation. The vehicle builders, for example, had a national membership of 19,000 in 1929, 30% of which was in the Midlands, and one in five of whom were unemployed.

Ten years later, the union membership had increased by 42 per cent, to exceed 27,000.¹⁷¹

In the Engineering Union, union growth was developing significantly quicker than the national average for the AEU as a whole. Between 1930 and 1938, whereas the total membership increased by 119%, in Coventry it grew by 166%, Birmingham by 200%, and Oxford, though from a smaller base, by 963%.¹⁷² By far, however, the fastest area of growth in the organisation of wage labour, in the motor industry districts, was among the semi skilled. Between 1930 and 1940, the number of TGWU members in No. 5 region increased fourfold. With a membership in excess of 75,000, the union not only emerged as the largest in the West Midlands, but its West Midlands membership accounted for 10.1% of the unions total membership in 1939, compared to only 6.9% at the beginning of the decade.¹⁷³ Apart from the frequent reports in the improvements in rates, working conditions, and union membership, the most important aspect of this general growth of the labour movement towards the end of the 1930s, was the re-emergence of the shop steward movement, in addition to the spread of organisation among the lesser skilled. In 1937, the District Organiser of the AEU could report not just a 2,000 increase in membership in Birmingham and an allround increase of 3s., but also the growth of the shop stewards movement.

"A most encouraging feature of the year has been the considerable growth of the shop stewards movement. This is really a worthwhile job. It asserts in making members, retaining them when they have joined and, most importantly of all, all brings to light immediately any attempt to worsen conditions".¹⁷⁴

Among the semi skilled, the spontaneous non union action of unorganised workforces was beginning to come under the umbrella of mass union organisations. In 1937, the union could report in Birmingham,

"Large numbers of concessions, increases in wages and various sections involved in several disputes, most of them unofficial, but have been able to settle them to the membership satisfaction".¹⁷⁵

Blewitt, the TGWU area secretary, could write in 1939 of the impact of organisations.

".....hundreds of new agreements been drawn up and put into force, membership up from 60,000 to 70,000.... new branches opening in the area. Unorganised firms visited, reorganisation obtained in all cases".¹⁷⁶

The expansion of the motor industry during the inter war period, was at the forefront of the developing technologies of the new industries in Britain. Not only did these new production methods provide changes in plant layout and labour utilisation, but the adoption of American technology made severe inroads into both the established engineering tradition, and also the industrial culture of the West Midlands, where the British motor firms became located. In the body shops and trim sections, for example, by the 1930s, the "independent republics of craftsmen"¹⁷⁷ had been replaced by assembly lines with perhaps 120 operatives working on a single section, whose individual job tasks had subdivided the work previously undertaken by a gang of few workers, into 500 operations. Mass assembly discarded a primacy of skill upon which traditional engineering had developed, but brought new labour problems in the inter war period. A manager of a British car plant stated,

"The solving of our production problems has created a new labour problem. In some instances the physical exertion required to lift heavy pieces and place them in machines is so great that we have to select operatives not because of their ability as machinists, but because of their physical strength".¹⁷⁸

Speed up and repetition of work tasks intensified the demands for physical effort by semi skilled operatives. American catch phrases became part of the vocabulary of foremen. "Step on it", "hop on it", became imported with the application of the technology to the mass assembly plants. In the British motor industry, the ruthlessness of competition in the product market and the logic of reorganisation in the paternalistic environment of the West Midlands, produced an employer philosophy which appeared at a distance from the co-operative character upon which labour relations of the small scale independent Birmingham manufacturers, or the workshop mentality of Coventry, or the rural and service occupations of Oxford, had developed.

The exercise of managerial power increasingly emerged as the rationalisation of production techniques, in which an employer strategy in labour relations policies developed more from a professional technical management, based around production managers, than the roots of a tradition of paternalism, with collaborative trade unionism, produced in the West Midlands. A labour policy based around a worker confidence in production management, was no longer the same as the Birmingham non conformist employer paternalism, but a blind conformity to the production policies of production management. The exercise of employer power in mass assembly, sought worker compliance almost exclusively through a cash nexus relationship rather than the intimacy of the workshop, which had been, and still, during the inter war period, continued to be, the basis of an industrial culture. The boldness of the motor manufacturers was not only removed from the craft based considerations of traditional engineering, they were also removed from the cultural traditions still represented within the regions infrastructure. In 1938, for example, over 1,500 different

trades were still being practiced in Birmingham, while ⁱⁿ over 10,000 factories, an average of less than 20 workers were employed,¹⁷⁹ many of whom produced parts for the motor industry. In sharp contrast, in 1939, 16,000 manual workers, plus 2,000 full time staff, were employed in car production at Longbridge, while a further 6,000 were employed at the Austin aero works.¹⁸⁰ This workforce travelled daily from over 102 towns and villages, with some workers coming from as far as Wolverhampton, Tamworth, Worcester, Leamington, and Stratford upon Avon. In addition to the transport resources of Birmingham Corporation and Midland Red, there were a further 66 private coach operators, 2,700 private cars, 3,000 cycles, bringing the labour force daily to the works, plus 7,000 commuting by train.¹⁸¹ In the works, over 247 distinct trades, 6,000 production machines, worked to an annual budget based upon a 142,500 minute year.¹⁸²

A managerial strategy of the motor manufacturers during the inter war period, developed upon worker compliance to the company, on the basis of devising payment systems which incurred increasing speed up and intensification of job deprivation for individual operators and led to widespread labour revolts, particularly where management sought lower rates. Wage labour in the motor industry in an insecure labour market, and where employer, and in the case of the General Strike, Government support, weakened the position of national trade unions and their leaderships, resorted to the unorganised exercise of power outside the decision making process. Employer policy of opposition to unionisation in the workplace, and the weak position of trade union generally, discouraged the development of continuous organisation in the workplace. The direction of the spontaneous power conflict and the emergence of strike committees,

owed more to the militant leaderships which the issues of conflict threw up. It enabled, in particular instances, for the activities of local Communist Party organisations to assist and advise the development of an organisation based upon the grievances of the workplace, rather than the administration of a large national union. As the position of wage labour in the product market began to improve, a rapid increase in union membership of the semi skilled, in massive national unions, coexisted with the independent character upon which workplace power had developed. Unionisation followed workplace militancy and a capacity for independent action. Managerial labour policies came under repeated challenge, while in its most advanced form, workplace organisation in the aircraft industry began to develop an autonomous organisation in situations of power conflict. It was during the second world war, that the state, in a national emergency, attempted to resolve employer policy, union control and an emerging workplace power, in industrial relations.

PART 4

THE NEW STABILITY

Abstract

Between 1939 and 1945, the war economy transformed the position of organised wage labour in the West Midland assembly plants. In a labour market characterised by acute shortages of manpower, and where industry and labour were required to adapt to munitions manufacture, it was the state which acquired extensive powers over industrial relations. State power entailed the virtual industrial conscription of wage labour and extended over into the traditional powers of prerogative exercised by employers. Legislative power over the free movement of labour restricted worker choice over jobs, but also removed the single authority of management in decisions concerning dismissal of a labour force. The absolute powers taken by the State in areas of manpower and industrial relations, however, were tempered by a policy to encourage industrial co-operation at workplace level. For differing reasons, the policies and strategies adopted by the state, and the views advocated by the TUC general council, despite opposition from the EEF, developed to both simultaneously increase the influence of workplace organisation, yet confine its growing power to within narrowly drawn, constitutionally prescribed, limits. It was during the war period, that these twin policies of industrial conscription and co-operation, built upon a patriotic fervour, not only compromised the disciplinary sanction of management over labour - the right to dismiss - but also paved the way for the involvement of shop stewards in redundancy decisions. Employers attitudes throughout the period remained pre-occupied by the long term consequences of the growing influence of shop stewards in the affairs of management in the workplace.

The section begins with an account of state control over the operation of the labour market. This is followed by an analysis of the process

whereby the growing influence of the organised shop stewards movement for a say in production issues, at workplace level, becomes contained within constitutionally prescribed Joint Production Committees.

The third section deals with the part shop stewards played in the origin of 'redundancy' in Britain, while the latter part outlines the impact of the war economy in the West Midlands.

1 THE STATE AND THE LABOUR MARKET

Changes in the labour market, brought about through the expansion of industry to meet the production requirements of the Second World War, led to a rapid expansion in trade union membership, throughout the engineering industry. Direct state intervention in industrial relations, in order to overcome limitations in the labour market secured the pre conditions for a widespread development of workplace organisation based upon industrial cooperation. The motor industry again became a major producer of munitions, and subject to government influence. Trade union membership and the appointment of shop stewards, spread across the assembly and components plants, which geared themselves to war production. The emerging shop steward organisations became the basis of the modern shop stewards movement. They were, however, firmly integrated into the management of a war economy. Their organisations, consequently, displayed far less organisational independence from both management and trade union organisation than the earlier movements. In the main, they fully supported increased production and national efficiency for the war effort, in return for a growth in trade union membership and greater influence within the workplace.

The initial responses of government, management and trade unions to the increased demand for production and labour, was not easily divorced from the experience of conditions during the inter war period. Pelling, the labour historian, writes of the relations between government and the unions at the beginning of the war,

"But there was a strong legacy of mutual distrust between the government and the unions, and this could not be cleared away in the somewhat unreal atmosphere of the early months of the war, which saw no sustained fighting and so failed to provide a sense of emergency." ¹

P. Inman, in her history of the munitions industry, writes,

"The pre-war sanction of dismissal to act as an incentive to high output and good timekeeping became largely ineffective." 2

The search was for ways of removing the element of distrust, by providing a more harmonious base to industrial relations, to resolve the questions of acute shortages of labour for industry and to greatly expand industrial efficiency and output. It was the manner through which these objectives were approached, within the context of the war period, which not only enhanced the status of trade unions in industry and society, but also secured the pre conditions for organisations at workplace level.

Before the formation of Winston Churchill's war cabinet and the appointment of Ernest Bevin as Minister of Labour and National Service, there had been considerable hesitation on the part of government to directly involve itself in some of the more pressing issues concerning organised labour. Despite the apparent shortage of skilled workers in the engineering industry, partly due to the low numbers of apprenticed labour during the depression, the government had been rather reluctant on the eve of the war to be involved in the 'dilution' issue for fear of industrial unrest. Consequently, it was left to the EEF and the AEU to reach an agreement in August 1939, permitting less skilled workers to be employed on traditionally skilled work. Though government did not wish to yield to the pressure for compulsion in the workplace, its policies progressed on the basis of compulsion in the last resort.

On the 27 November 1940 Bevin argued in the House of Commons that,

"Whatever my weaknesses, I can claim that I understand the working classes of this country. I had to determine whether I would be a leader or a dictator, and I preferred, and still prefer to be a leader." ³

He went on to say,

"If conscription had been applied to labour in the manner it was applied in the army it would have been making directly for defeat." ⁴

Sir John Anderson, who as Lord Privy Seal had been in charge of evacuation, and became famous for the construction of the 'Anderson Shelter', stated on the 5 December, after appointment to the Home Office, on the question of industrial conscription that,

"The test to be applied in deciding whether to use compulsion or not was whether it would give results. That is not to say that compulsion would not be applied in the case of civilian labour where it was the last and most appropriate method." ⁵

By the 14 December, 'The Economist', among others, was calling for the introduction of conscription for industrial workers.

It claimed,

"There is no inviolable barrier between soldiering and war work." ⁶

Compulsion, it claimed, was required, not only to undertake particular jobs, but also to ensure that workers remained in those jobs.

"If the first aim of wartime labour policy is to place all available labour where it is required in the national interest, the second is to keep it there; and just as compulsory means may be needed for the first, some sort of sanctions (applied to workers and employers alike) may eventually be required for the second." ⁷

The government, in order to meet the requirements of the war industries, began to move in this direction. Speaking in the House of Commons on the 21 January 1941, Ernest Bevin, the Minister of Labour said,

"Although everything had been and would be achieved by voluntary means, we have now reached a stage when it would be necessary to have industrial registration by age groups, and by this means to make a list of those who should be called upon to serve the state in national industry." 8

This, the introduction of the Registration for Employment Orders, provided the state with statistical information on the skill abilities of the labour force, which could not be drawn from the existing data based upon the unemployment books.

Opposition to dilution within the workplace did not prove to be a major cause of worker resistance to the allocation of labour.⁹ A more important aspect of the dilution question lay in the belief that it could create the possibility of transfer to other areas of the country. This would involve, beyond personal questions of domestic disruption and difficulties obtaining accommodation and housing, confronting the wide variations in basic wage levels, bonus rates and piecework prices which existed between different regions, districts and among individual firms, within engineering. There was no guarantee that the structure of the labour market would facilitate the distribution of classes of labour for war production. Given the opportunities for extensive overtime working, especially among semi skilled workers on piecework, the increased earnings could encourage a movement of highly skilled workers on a fixed wage to lesser skilled work. The Restriction of Engagement Order (1940) was introduced, to prevent the poaching of labour by employers. The legislation controlled the movement of labour, by compelling employers to recruit workers only from state run labour exchanges or through approved trade union channels. This act did little to secure a redistribution of labour in existing employment.¹⁰

In order to encourage geographical mobility, the MOL adopted the principle that labour transferred ought to be paid the 'rate for the job' to which it had been accustomed. Attempts to establish universal basic rates were not successful, though uniform rates were introduced for skilled workers in some government and admiralty works. In engineering, the EEF and AEU were able to reach agreement whereby transferred workers would receive the basic rate for the district from which they had been subsequently employed should that rate be higher than the place of their transfer. To discourage the movement away from the skilled engineering occupations, a national agreement enabled skilled toolroom workers to be guaranteed a fixed differential above the earnings of skilled pieceworkers. This was to be a percentage increase based upon the level of earnings within their own plant. In Coventry, where the pre war motor industry became a major area for aircraft and munition production for the war period, the high concentration of semi skilled workers resulted in a local agreement, where the basis for calculating the toolmakers differential was a figure drawn from the rates of skilled pieceworkers for the whole district. These agreements were aimed at reducing the movement of highly skilled workers to less skilled work, and to take skilled labour out of competition between employers.¹¹

On the issue of wages, Bevin was able to get an agreement between the employers representatives and the TUC, which enabled the government to dispense with thoughts of a wages freeze. Instead of this, wages would be conducted through the existing collective bargaining machinery, but to settle pay disputes compulsory arbitration would replace the right to strike. Strikes were to be prohibited. The cooperation which developed in industry, was

more the result of the wartime national emergency and general support for the objectives of a war against fascism, than responses to administrative and legislative changes. It was when faced with a growing shortage of labour, however, that the state increased its powers to direct the supply of labour, and provisions were made which altered some of the fundamental rights associated with managerial prerogative.

The requirement to tighten up the restrictions introduced to control the movement of labour, led directly to the ultimate loss of the employers traditional rights to dismiss his labour force.

The Minister of Labour said to the Commons in January 1941,

"It would have to be laid down that, in certain types of war work, the right of dismissal, except for misconduct, must be taken out of the hands of the employers. If a person's services could no longer be used in a particular place it would have to be reported to the employment department so that his services might be used elsewhere. Similarly no employee would be allowed to leave such vital work without permission of the National Service Officer."
(NSO) 12

Sanctions were to apply to both employer and worker,

"If an employer or employee broke orders they would have committed an offence. If a person who had been wrongfully stood off could prove it, he would have to be paid for lost time. On the other hand, if a person stayed away from his productive effort he could be ordered to return to his place of employment." 13

The Essential Works Order (General Provisions), introduced in 1941, gave specific powers to the Minister of Labour to schedule establishments considered essential to the requirements of war production. The legislation was intended to fill weaknesses in the Restriction in Engagement Order, regarding the free movement of labour, by establishing state controls to reduce labour turnover in essential industries. The main features of the order were that

employers were prohibited from discharging labour in areas of scheduled employment, and workers were prevented from leaving their employment without the permission of the Ministry of Labour. Having abandoned a dependence upon the workings of the labour market to distribute workers in employment, the curtailment of the right of labour to freely choose its employer was offset by restrictions upon the employer to freely dispose of his workers. Employees could be reported to the National Service Officer on questions of absenteeism, be expected to work specified hours, while employers would have to attain satisfactory working conditions and welfare facilities and guarantee a weekly minimum wage.

The EWOs, through increasing state control over the direction of labour, had provision to create favourable circumstances within which transferred labour would be more likely to accept their new situation. In the creation of these minimum provisions, the removal of the employers traditional right to dismiss an employee without approval of a ministry official, plus rights of appeal on questions of employment security, removed the arbitrary discretion of management to dismiss. Although the opposition of the Appeals Board tended to qualify workers security in employment,¹⁴ the EWO increasingly made it difficult for employers to sack workers for trade union activity. Through these orders, which eventually covered 7 million workers, the intervention of the state in the labour market, established rights against dismissal in exchange for powers to industrially conscript labour.¹⁵

The general improvement in the market position for labour and the desire for flexibility and cooperation of organised labour for war

production, made it increasingly difficult for employers to prevent the appointment of shop stewards in the workplace. The EWO obstructed their dismissal. The role of the state in the labour market during a national emergency aided the development of workplace organisations.

2 'CONSTITUTIONAL' SHOP STEWARDS ORGANISATIONS

Although legislation, combined with the economic position of organised labour, reduced employer resistance to shop steward appointments, it was the development of Joint Production Committees (JPCs), at the end of 1941 and the beginning of 1942, which symbolised attempts to remove potential sources of opposition in the workplace. The committees provided a constitutional framework prescribing the activities of workplace organisations within the objectives of increasing war production. They enhanced the status of shop stewards in the war industries, but inhibited any tendencies towards the development of independent workplace organisation.

Shop steward organisations in engineering had begun to regain some influence with the rearmament programme, which began in the aircraft industry during the late 1930s. The formation of the engineering and allied trades shop stewards national council (SSNC), with its monthly newspaper 'New Propellor', provided a forum for information and contact between workplace organisations.¹⁶

In 1941, it demonstrated its potential influence in engineering by calling a conference attended by 1,237 delegates representing over half a million workers.¹⁷ As such gatherings were outside the control of trade union leaders, and shop stewards committees were not recognised by managements in the workplace, the possibility of the creation of a network of workshop committees, operating at national and local levels, raised the question of an unofficial movement possessing autonomy and independence. That this did not occur cannot be entirely explained without an understanding of the commitment of the shop stewards organisations to the objectives

of the war aims. That an independent shop floor movement did not appear, however, resides in the commitment to stability in industrial relations, not just on the part of government, trade unions, and to a lesser extent management, but also the shop stewards. The production committees were the organisational means for the new stability, on the basis of integrating shop stewards into the objectives of war production.

The entry of the Soviet Union into the war on the side of the allies, after its invasion by Germany on 21 June 1941, transformed the British Communist Party's attitude towards the war effort.¹⁸ Their support for increased productivity and opposition to unofficial strikes paved the way for the formulation of a policy of industrial stability among the engineering shop stewards.¹⁹ Initially, they had attempted to expose production hold ups and, where responsibility could be attached to either government or management, they claimed stricter state control, in some cases nationalisation. Agitation for production committees, however, resulted from pressure for increased output to be met within the existing framework of management, and prevailing state controls.

Walter Swanson, the Convenor at Napiers Aircraft factory, opening the Conference of Engineering and Allied Trades Shop Stewards on 19 October 1941, called for a JPC in every factory and the provision of full facilities for each shop steward taking part. He argued for the acceptance of joint responsibility by stewards and managements for seeing that production plans were discussed with workforces and properly implemented. The role of the Shop Steward Committees were,

"To work for coordination of the Works Shop Stewards Committees so that with the help of the trade union district committees, every facility is obtained for advancing proposals, checking up weaknesses, and stimulating production throughout a particular industrial district or area, and in this way strengthen and extend the work of Regional Production Boards." 20

Swanson, giving the opening address to the conference, saw the shop stewards as directly aiding the productivity of the workforce. He claimed in his summing up,

"If workers in the factories today and tomorrow set up JPC's, and if the shop stewards movement as a result of this conference, has the very valuable assistance of the press, we can really stir up the masses of people in this country, then the control of industry will not be a question for platform speeches, it will be a question for everyday action in the factories." 21

A government report in 1942, based upon the observations of the Regional Industrial Relations Officers, claimed that joint committees would not challenge managerial control.

"It would appear that only in a very small number of cases could it be successfully contended that the joint machinery is being used to interest the workers representatives in the production difficulties of the managements, although some difficulties may have a direct repercussion on the wages and conditions of the workers." 22

Discounting JPCs as a mechanism for gaining direct worker involvement in managerial questions, the report went on to support a constitutional framework for positively engaging the shop floor into war production. The report said:

"Apart, however, from any direct interest of this character (shop steward interest in management functions) on the part of the workers, they are showing under the stimulus of the shop stewards movement an increasing concern in production problems from the point of view of the national effort and advantage should clearly be taken of that fact by providing constitutional means whereby that concern can be translated into active cooperation." 23

To the TUC General Council, the creation of JPC's appeared to resolve a number of questions concerning the deficiencies in individual trade union organisations, surrounding the relationship between workplace organisation, based around shop stewards, and trade union structures based upon union officials. They feared the development of unofficial organisations, but were aware of the limitations in their attempting to ban them. The Munitions Production Committee argued:

It... "saw dangers in allowing an unofficial body to develop and to form local and district machinery in order to deal with problems that were the responsibility of elected Trade Union Executive Committees'. However, we recognise that merely banning unofficial organisations will not produce the desired result. The General Council recognise that the present machinery is not completely satisfactory, steps should therefore be taken to strengthen it."²⁸

Protection from summary dismissal may have been a positive aspect of state control over the direction of labour, for trade unionists, but the creation of JPCs symbolised more clearly attempts to remove the experience of inter war bitterness from the climate of industrial relations. They were seen in government circles as a means for overcoming belligerent industrial attitudes, by providing an instrument for unity between management and labour for the war effort. The more cautious response from sections of management, reflected a suspicion that they could undermine managerial authority in the workplace. For the SSNC, the sustained enthusiasm for production committees following the German invasion of Russia in 1941, was seen by its left wing leadership as contributing to the defeat of fascism and assisting in the defence of the Soviet Union, by providing the opportunity for direct worker involvement in the organisation of work.

The SSNC advocated JPCs in every factory to improve efficiency and increase production. They saw them as a means of extending the shop stewards role in supporting the management of war production. The government having involved trade unionists in the administration of its policies at a number of levels, was aware that what was lacking was the opportunity for the positive involvement of the rank and file at the point of production. Aware that cooperation of trade union officials did not necessarily mean compliance of an organised shop floor, the government, seeking the support of both trade union leaderships and the shop stewards movement, saw production committees as providing a role for shop floor workers without 'superceding' the management of the firm.²⁹

Existence of the committees, it was thought, besides weakening intransigent attitudes, would encourage workers to relax their traditional job controls over output, speed up production, reduce delays, ease bottlenecks, and generally improve morale.³⁰ The committees were seen to encourage a more positive application of work, knowledge and experience to industry, increase productivity, promote harmony, and reduce conflict. They were seen as means for communicating to workers, government and managements, reasons for changes in production, and needs for labour rationalisation and redundancies.³¹ The JPCs were also to deal with the social control of labour over issues like discipline, lateness, absenteeism as well as welfare, transport, hours of work, etc.³²

The engineering employers, however, did not willingly accept the idea of production committees. Employers argued that increased output owed more to scientific innovation, industrial design and

layout, and managerial expertise, than to committees of workers. These views of employers were forcibly presented by the conservative MP, Sir Patrick Hannon, in his address to a meeting of manufacturers on the 21 January 1942.

"It would be a grave day," he said, "for industrial life and for the relations of industry itself if we transfer either in whole or in part, any substantial share of the executive power of industry to bodies elected by the workers." ³³

Mass observation reflected the dilemma facing employers over the basis of their own authority in industry and the question of the national interest arising out of the war effort. The study concluded,

"However sacrificial his readiness to victory, if he is trained in the thinking of business for profit, the implications of what is happening to the factory now, in terms of the future are bound to present themselves." ³⁴

The research found that it was management, more than any other group, which dwelt upon the post war prospects. On the 2 January, The Times openly criticised preoccupations with the future as

"Being given too prominent a place in the plans and activities of too many industrial concerns." ³⁵

The Economist criticising the slow progress being made in the setting up of JPCs emphasised their advantages for production and was led to blame both employers and the union leadership for their negative attitude towards them. On the 24 January, their leader said of the committees that were in existence,

"They have thus contributed to the maintenance of morale and often to an increase in output per man. Unfortunately there is reason to believe that the trade unions frequently look upon them with disfavour as the trade marked merchandise of the shop steward movement, and employers too, sometimes discourage their establishment." ³⁶

The SSNC had been pushing for JPC since August 1941. On the 4 May 1942, The Times welcomed the eventual agreement reached between the engineering employers and the trade unions, for the

establishment of the committees, which it saw in terms of their importance for increasing production.

"The agreement between the Engineering National Employers Federation," it claimed, "and Trade Unions for setting up Joint Consultative Committees on production is likely to be a major factor increasing Britain's war production." ³⁷

This claim was strongly contested in a letter from Mr. T.G. John, Chairman and Managing Director of Alvis, in Coventry. He wrote on 7 May,

"To suggest that a joint committee of shop stewards working in cooperation with a stewards committee and unions and so, is going to take care of a defect which is essential to winning the war is just political non sense." ³⁸

He went on to argue,

"The part of the war effort which incorporates the great aircraft industry begins with the genius and scientific ability of its designers following on with the utilisation of long and specialised experience of its managers concerned with production, then the skill and physical pertinacity and loyalty of the workpeople, and ultimately with the skill and heroism of the airforce men who put the products into actual use to vanguish our enemies." ³⁹

The value of shop stewards, he claimed to be of limited importance in the context of the war effort.

"Internal works organisations such as those of shop stewards can give valuable help in some of these directions (concerning production matters) and undoubtedly are welcomed, but what great dis-service can be done to national war winning efforts by distorting such things out of proper perspective into a relatively unimportant creed - and is this the time for doing so?" ⁴⁰

Executive functions of management, were widely thought not to be shared with elected bodies of workers. Behind the engineering industry's opposition lay the employers traditional demand to control his own workplace. They were particularly opposed to the development of any organisational structures which removed discussions of workshop issues away from the domestic atmosphere of the individual factory, outside the specific prerogative of

plant management. They were therefore opposed to joint committees operating at district level, parallel to the structure of trade union organisation.⁴¹

Trade unions, on the other hand when they came to accept the need for JPCs, wished to have district production committees as these would enable full-time officials to influence the activities of their shop stewards, and possibly prevent a basis for the emergence of unofficial organisation.⁴² A major concern of the national trade union leadership was the widespread development of unofficial shop steward organisations in engineering. The main fear was that these organisations would develop machinery at district and national level on questions which the trade union leadership considered to be its responsibility. The difficulty for the national officers was that shop stewards were recognised by their individual unions, but their organisations, cutting across several unions, were not. They, therefore, were not subject to the authority and control of individual union leaderships. Believing that the shop stewards movement was in danger of coming under a controlling influence of the Communist Party, the union leadership took the view that it was necessary to establish some form of official machinery so that stewards organisations could come under the joint control of employers and trade unions, rather than be left to develop its own independent existence. They appreciated that merely to ban shop steward organisations would reinforce their sense of independence. Yet to grant recognition to workshop committees raised the possibility of their replacing the role of the full-time officials, or becoming too close to management and less subject to union influence. JPCs resolved these dilemmas by instituting machinery in the workplace which

legitimated the role of shop stewards, by narrowly defining the limits to his powers through the constitution of JPCs.

Under the agreement, the production committees were to be essentially consultative, as opposed to negotiating committees,

"The objective of which is consultation between management and workers in order to arrive at a mutual understanding in regard to the conditions of production, and the conditions of maximum production." 43

Their activity was confined to meeting criteria acceptable to the employers. The role of the committees were to cover:

- 1) Suggestions for the improvement and maintenance of production.
- 2) The observance of works rules, discipline, absenteeism.
- 3) Welfare, safety, air raid precautions, etc.

The consultative nature of the committees and the restricting of their functions to aiding the management of war production, helped alleviate employers fears over control in the workplace. The employers insisted that JPC. powers and spheres of influence should be clearly distinguished from those of works committees. Production committees were not to deal with questions relating to wages and conditions, or issues which could normally be dealt within the industries Procedure for Disputes. Membership of the committees were to be confined to representatives of manual workers. The EEF refused to widen the committees to include technical or clerical personnel, on grounds that staff were part of management. 45

The Government, convinced of the trade unions view of production committees, was able to reach an agreement with the unions for their establishment in government munitions factories. Under government pressure, the engineering employers entered into an

arrangement with the engineering unions, whereby they recommended to their member firms ^{the} setting up JPCs. The committees were to be established voluntarily. They were to be purely private and domestic bodies, being without compulsion or attachment to any system of appeal.⁴⁶

A year after their introduction, Sir Stafford Cripps, the Minister for Aircraft Production, spoke, on the 9 January 1943, both of their importance to war economy of the production committees, and to the limitations which they placed upon worker involvement.

"In these committees all the production sense of all the workers should find its expression. It is not intended that it should in any way supercede the management whose duty it is to manage the whole production machine."⁴⁷

He went on to say

"They should deal with production problems and all the ways and means that can contribute from all grades and sections of the workers to the speeding up and improvement of production. That is their job and if they stick to it and if everyone contributes to the suggestions and discussions, we shall have created a really useful democratic implement."⁴⁸

The AEU production inquiry in March 1943, revealed that 13 out of 14 firms which claimed 100% increase in output had JPCs. The inquiry claimed that the

"most outstanding single factor helping to increase output"⁴⁹ was the cooperation between management and workers in establishments with JPCs and that 58% of all cases of increased production was the result of workers suggestions.⁵⁰ The work of the committees was claimed for contributing to improved time keeping, lower absenteeism, improved workshop organisation, better use of plant and machinery, and effective use of diluted and female labour.⁵¹ It reported that 27 per cent of firms without committees were due largely to management opposition, but a further 15 per cent did

not exist owing to worker opposition to them.⁵²

The Committees were not without their critics among trade unionists.⁵³ Their tendency was, in instances, to act as absenteeism courts, or become forums for managements to lecture workers and avoid questions of production. Over 4,000 JPCs were established by the end of the war and it is not unreasonable to suppose that they did have an effect upon output.⁵⁴ Crucial to their success remained the attitude of the Shop Stewards Committees. The SSNC issued a statement on the 29 January 1942, welcoming the support now coming from the TUC for the creation of JPCs, but pointed out

"These committees can only function successfully in getting production increased if they are composed of representatives of the employers, the management, and of shop stewards. They must have a strictly democratic basis as far as the worker representatives are concerned. In short, the successful functioning of JPC's depends upon their free election." ⁵⁵

Where they existed, they enhanced the role of stewards. Trade union insistence that only members of unions could stand for election to production committees, resulted in candidates being drawn almost entirely from shop stewards. The more effectively organised factories had regular JPCs meetings in working hours, with time off for shop stewards to meet prior to the meetings and enhanced the status and importance of workshop organisation.⁵⁶

JPCs encouraged the development of workplace organisations in constitutional channels, by prescribing the role for shop stewards within a framework compatible with the objectives of higher output and productivity in the workplace. Although this may have inhibited the emergence of an independent shop stewards movement, the acceptance by managements, during the conditions of wartime,

helped to build up shop stewards and trade union membership. It provided the conditions to organise openly, and increased shop floor strength and confidence which was both a reflection and an indication of security for active trade unionists. The committees operating in the workplace provided representative experience for a whole generation of trade unionists.⁵⁷ This undermined many of the myths underpinning the notion of 'managerial prerogative', and established the basis for a post-war shop stewards organisation.⁵⁸

As the JPCs were responsible for the organisation of air raid duties among the workforce, the role of the shop steward was also a link between war production in the factories and national defence.⁵⁹ Shop steward organisations grew considerably during the second world war but although it enhanced the shop stewards role in the workplace, workplace organisation did not possess the independence of the first world war shop stewards movement.

3 REDUNDANCY AND WORKPLACE RELATIONS

The state had directly intervened in industrial relations to meet deficiencies in the labour market over the distribution of labour skills, in a period of acute labour shortages. The war effort was a pursuit which outweighed the preservation of managerial prerogative over the allocation and discharge of labour. Selection and transfer of labour was vetted by ministry officials on the basis of what was considered essential to improving war production. The method arrived at for the handling of redundancies developed to facilitate the selection of workers required for essential work. Under the procedures established, shop stewards played an indispensable role in the process of selecting workers for redundancy. They were able to act as watch dogs against possible employer victimisation and protectors against the use of redundancy to weaken workplace organisation. It was at the end of the war, when the state abandoned its control in the labour market, that the question of redundancy and the security of workplace organisation became again a major issue in engineering and more so in the post-war motor industry.

The employers were most pre-occupied by the possible long term implications of changes taking place in industry.⁶⁰ Among workforces, the experiences of the inter war depression retained an image of pessimism for the post war future. The end of the war was considered to spell an inevitable return to a world of unemployment. Mass observation investigators commented that insecurity might contribute to a loss of work incentive, as feelings of military victories would only result in the bleak prospect of a return to past experiences.⁶¹ Worker insecurity had been the basic assumption

of industry. The sack had been the central force of managerial authority. The effect of war and war production upon the labour market, did not appear to have removed conceptions of long term insecurity from the workforce. Dilution arrangements, the demand for manpower in the armed forces, plus the enrolment of 'green' labour into the war industries, all raised questions of what would happen to such workers following the cessation of hostilities. State powers had modified the traditional control of employers to dismiss an employee without the approval of the NSO. : Employers decisions could be contested by workplace representatives, given the period of high demand and general shortage of labour skills. It was not until the later stages of the war that insecurity of employment, in the form of redundancy began to materialise upon a significant scale. As government war contracts began to run down and were even cancelled, the prospect of surplus labour again presented itself. In engineering, the dilution agreements between employers and unions, plus the provisions contained in the EWOs, inhibited managerial rights to dismiss its workforce.

The handling of redundancies developed out of the procedures designed to facilitate the selection of workers for transfer to essential work. In engineering, during the early part of the war, the Ministry of Labour, acting on the advice of the Engineering Industry Advisory Panel, issued instructions on the method to be adopted for selecting workers for transfer to other areas of employment.⁶² Volunteers were subject to ministry approval, which was taken following consultation with both management and trade union representatives. Where volunteers were insufficient or were not of the particular labour required, a selection procedure

would come into force, in which management would have to present their choice of workers to the shop stewards. The stewards could oppose anyone on the list, provided they submitted an adequate substitute who they considered more appropriate for transfer. The criteria for assessing substitutes had to take into account the skill of the worker and the needs of the prospective job, the importance of the work undertaken, in addition to questions of domestic responsibilities, age and length of service with the firm.⁶³

It was then up to the management to either agree or reject the shop stewards suggestions. In the case of rejection, a Ministry official would engage in consultation with management, shop stewards and the actual workers concerned, before deciding who would be transferred. The procedure was designed for circumstances where large numbers of workers were required to be transferred. Where only a few workers were involved, a speedier, more informal approach was adopted in the hope of reaching an early agreement between managements and shop stewards.⁶⁴ Both the selection procedure and the informal method enabled prior agreement on selecting workers for transfer, the belief being that this would reduce possible grounds of appeal or contention surrounding the movement of labour.

The selection procedure, although agreed by the EEF and TU representatives on the advisory panel, remained voluntary. It was largely adhered to by the employers in instances of transferring labour, but in Coventry, the employers association began to press for the restoration of rights to discharge labour without consultations with shop stewards in cases of redundancy.⁶⁵ As the

procedure did not place an obligation upon employers to consult, the Coventry employers wished to dispense with shop steward consultations over the selection of redundant workers. They were attempting to distinguish between the transfer of workers from the redundancy of workers, and were attempting to exercise their discretion over consultations. In other words, they were attempting to dispense with prior agreement with shop stewards on the selection of redundant workers.

By the middle of 1944, pressure in the EEF was building up against what they viewed as difficulties preventing their ability to dispense with surplus labour. They complained that despite agreements being reached with ^{the} NSO, long delays took place before Ministry officials arranged for transfers.⁶⁶ Redundant labour was remaining employed and receiving wages for negligible work. They reported that unions were beginning to oppose further dilutions, on the grounds that suitable skilled labour was already available within the area, and that there was under utilisation of skilled workers.⁶⁷ The employers were arguing that Ministry officials were imposing procedures on them for transfer of labour, in instances which they considered to be redundancies. This was resulting in employers redundancy lists being open to scrutiny by shop stewards at workplace level. The engineering federation, having discussed the emerging situation with the Ministry of Labour, were satisfied that these criticisms, voiced by their affiliated members, were not the result of any intended government policy.⁶⁸ The Ministry held the view that, generally, there still remained a shortage of labour of all classes which could be fully accommodated in employment. It was largely a question of being informed where the redundant labour existed, so that arrangements

for transfer could be made to firms and districts where it was in short supply. Delays concerning declared redundancies were, in the main, due to reasons of suspected victimisation whereupon a firm's application would not be finalised until the question of victimisation had been dealt with in accordance with the procedure machinery for the engineering industry.⁶⁹

A more significant disagreement emerged over dilution in relation to redundancy during 1944. The operation of the relaxation agreement had arisen during a local conference in Lancashire. At the conference, it was claimed that it had been accepted in principle by the Joint Relaxation Committee, that, where redundancy occurs, the management would, in the first instance, dismiss 'dilutees' in accordance with the intention of the provision of the Relaxation agreement.⁷⁰ Though this was the acceptable method for redundancy by the AEU, the union was concerned that it was not a universal practice.⁷¹

They argued that changes in the war situation, resulting in sudden alterations in production programmes, were creating redundancies, but while skilled workers and apprentices in some districts were being dismissed, dilutees and female labour were being kept on. A report that production would be reduced by 50% in six Coventry factories, creating a possible 10,000 redundancies, caused the unions to claim that a general deterioration was occurring, with the possibility of strikes taking place.⁷² The union leadership wanted the dilution agreements put in reverse, with skilled men having preference for employment over diluted labour. They demanded that employers should now recognise that skilled labour, which had a history in the industry, should have first call in

engineering over labour introduced for the war period.⁷³

The employers were not fully sympathetic towards this position. They argued that ultimate control over labour questions still remained with the Ministry under the EWO provisions. Employers could state that they had surplus labour in particular categories, but could not discharge them without NSO approval.⁷⁴ For the employers, if there was a choice between skilled and diluted labour it would be, from the engineering point of view, more advantageous to discharge the skilled worker, who possessed a much broader based training and experience in the industry, than the dilutees who possessed a limited working knowledge, often confined to specific operations in particular plants. They were thus far less adaptable to changing industrial processes.⁷⁵ The EEF were attempting to articulate a general interest of their members. Mobility of skilled labour possessed certain advantages. Having been assured by the Ministry that there were still overall shortages of most classes of labour, but more especially for highly skilled workers, they argued that the unions were seeing redundancy only in terms of a particular firm rather than the industry as a whole. The national interest, they argued, could not be served by questions of which category of labour to dismiss. The release of dilutees would not provide the same optimum production levels as that of skilled labour. The whole question needed to be viewed in terms of what was understood as the general demand for labour.

The AEU were not prepared to accept such a perspective. It was, to them, contrary to the spirit from within which it had entered into dilution agreements in 1939. They considered as a first

principle of dilution, that it was permissible when skilled labour was not available, for firms and employers to engage other types of labour on work which had previously been done by skilled men. It was an evasion of this principle of the agreement, whereby firms declared to the Ministry that, in the first instance, skilled men or apprentices were redundant. The initiative should not come from the employers, who could not discharge their responsibility under the agreement by saying that the Ministry had overriding power.

Underlying the union case was the belief that their membership had agreed to abide by the dilution agreements on the assumption that they would not operate to the material deprivation of workers who had been prepared to give up many of their traditional customs and practices.⁷⁶ In the course of the war period skilled workers had actively assisted in the training of new or upgraded recruits to the engineering industry. Now however, as there was a falling off in orders and contracts in some sectors of the economy, the position beginning to face the traditional engineering workforce was the threat of redundancy and the prospect of having to move residence to find employment. It was at this point that they thought that relaxation agreements should be put in reverse.

On the 30 August 1944, an agreed statement between the EEF and AEU endorsed the existing position on dilution for war production, but stated that where reductions in numbers of workers was to take place under relaxation agreements, the employers accepted the principle that dilutees should first be submitted to the NSO. This position was widened in informal discussion with the General

and Municipal Workers. Both parties accepted as general policy the view taken when dilution had been introduced,

"that men who belong to the industry whose history was with the industry and who had an engineering background should have a greater moral claim on the industry than men who might be brought out of agriculture or a retail shop." ⁷⁷

This would still hold good where redundancies occurred.

Preferential claims to an engineering job, as a defence against redundancy, were to be made upon the rights of skill and a working history in the industry.

Two complications, however, enter into this reasoning. It was argued that during the last five years, even under a peace time economy new entrants would have entered engineering either to meet normal natural wastage or expansion in output.⁷⁸ Further there existed the situation where workers in engineering had been upgraded from within the industry. What was their claim on job rights? The position of the Transport and General was that upgraded semi skilled workers should return to their previous jobs.⁷⁹ It was the last in the industry who should be first to leave.

In the second half of 1944, large scale redundancies began to affect the war industries. As 3 million engineering workers were employed, munitions cuts in military programmes would have considerable implications for employment.⁸⁰ In Birmingham, a third of the city's total population was engaged in munitions employment,⁸¹ while the population of Coventry had grown by some 60,000 with the expansion of the armament industry between 1935 and 1940.⁸² The war economy had resulted in a sharp reduction in the production of cars for civilian purposes, but the importance

of the industry's technology for munitions production had expanded total productive capacity. Employment in the industry had increased from 253,000 to 407,000 between 1939 and 1943; less than one third, however, were engaged in car production, the majority were working on military vehicles, aircraft and other forms of munitions work.⁸³ Eighty per cent of ~~auto~~ engines were⁸⁴ manufactured in motor industry establishments. A third of the workforce in 1944 were women workers, compared to less than a tenth in 1939.⁸⁵ Readjustment to a peacetime economy necessitated reductions in workers and closures of plants.

The important issue which confronted shop steward organisations was the need to control the process of redundancy and change, so that wartime gains in earnings and conditions could be maintained through the actions of workplace organisations. Coventry's growth in the armament industry had brought a greater dependence upon the motor industry.⁸⁶ Between 1944 and 1945, jobs in the Coventry shadow factories were being lost at a rate of 350 to 400 a week.⁸⁷ In just over three months, employment had fallen from 25,000 to 10,000 in the shadow factories.⁸⁸ Pressure from shop steward organisations and trade union officials resulted in workplace organisations becoming involved in the joint regulation of job loss.

The origins of a national policy of cooperation between unions and management on wartime redundancy, arose out of the rapid decline in the munitions industry in the Midlands. In Coventry, the district union officials were unaware of redundancy notices appearing on factory notice boards in July and August 1944.⁸⁹ It was only under pressure from the shop floor that the Midland

regional officials agreed to meet shop stewards.⁹⁰ Under pressure from the trade unions and with such large numbers of workers being involved in the rundown of munitions production in the shadow factories, the COV EEA relented upon their earlier attempts to confine shop steward involvement to questions of transfers of labour while preserving the question of redundancy for management.⁹¹

Although this change of view appears to have been taken to prevent possible grounds for worker unrest, it also became seen as a means for enabling a speedier discharge of labour through redundancy appeals being lodged against selection to the MOL. At a local conference in September 1944 the COV EEA and local trade union officials reached an agreement on procedure for handling redundancies. The agreement provided the shop stewards with an indispensable role in the process of job loss. Where a redundancy was to take place the management would draw up schedules of the workers affected, copies of which would be given to the MOL and the plant shop stewards. It was agreed that management, in preparing their lists would take account of:

- 1) Whether the worker was a mobile or immobile person.
- 2) Whether he or she was a Coventry person or an "imported" worker.
- 3) Particulars as to time keeping etc.
- 4) Dilution agreements in cases of skilled workers.⁹²

A record sheet for every worker was to be drawn up, so that when the cuts came the lists could be established on the basis for agreed selection. This local agreement was intended to serve the particular requirements of the structure of the Coventry

workforce, where large numbers of directed workers had been sent to the munitions factories. The involvement of the shop stewards was to encourage their cooperation in the discharge of labour, and help assemble an agreed list so redundancies could be enacted within a period of two weeks.

The shop stewards had rights to make alterations in workers selected by management; they could offer substitutes. Where disagreement emerged the MOL would hold the balance. On questions of dilutees, stewards were to approve as much of the list as possible and leave aside doubtful cases. Their submission of substitutes was to be compiled within two days. For dilutees, length of service in the industry was to be taken into account. This gave a stronger claim to employment to those with more than a wartime experience of the industry. Consultation over dilutions was to be made through the chief shop steward of the union involved or the shop steward negotiating committee.

Although this agreement gave recognition to the role of shop stewards in the redundancy of labour, the Coventry trade unions produced their own seven point policy to strengthen membership and organisation in a period of reductions in workers. On the 31 October 1944, the Coventry engineering unions agreed upon the basis for selecting substitutes. These were

"(1) That non trade unionists should be substituted for trade unionists as redundant. We regard this as the most important clause in these proposals and over-riding all others.

"(2) Wartime entrants from other industries on skilled, semi skilled and unskilled work to be the first to be transferred by MOL to suitable work within their own trades. We recognise, however, that cases will arise which will make it necessary to transfer even skilled men to post-war development work within the engineering industry.

"(3) The dilution agreement should be immediately implemented both as regards men and women, and our member dilutees should be down graded to their previous work.

"(4) Workers resident in Coventry shall be retained in preference to those who are not in the district.

"(5) Immobile labour shall be given preference to mobile labour.

"(6) Length of service in the industry shall be taken into consideration in connection with the selection procedure, as against length of service at the firm.

"(7) Dispersed workers shall be given equal consideration with others." ⁹³

The policy of the Coventry engineering trade unions on wartime redundancy, combined the maintenance of trade union membership in the workplace with the application of rules which would govern the general selection of redundant workers. The unions were trying to reduce wartime redundancy as possible grounds for arbitrary managerial selection of workers by reason of trade union membership, activity or representation. In other words, in exchange for the agreement of job loss was an acquired control over the process of dismissal. By establishing union membership, seniority, skill and dilution rights as factors in the process of selection, the elimination of victimisation established a prior entitlement over job rights for categories of workers.

To gain some controlling influence over the process of redundancy was clearly an essential requirement to preventing a return to arbitrary dismissal of the inter war period. This was the objective of the shop stewards national committee in engineering. In January 1945 it set out a six point plan for handling redundancy.

- (A) No new labour to be taken on.
- (B) Volunteers, or those wishing to return to home town.
- (C) Part-time workers and those from other industries now needing labour for priority requirements should be released.
- (D) Operation of dilution agreements.
- (E) Selection to be on basis of factory as a whole and not on departmental basis.
- (F) No-one to leave until union organisation had been informed of details of job, rates of pay and conditions to which redundant worker was being sent.⁹⁴

The procedure was defining job rights, which in effect would tend to favour long servicing employees. The rights to consultation over redundancy however were far from clear.

Throughout most of the war period, the question of employment and discharge of labour had been subject to statutory regulation. In cases of transfer of workers on the initiative of the state, the supply officer would inform the firm of the number of workers required. Volunteers would be called for and where their number fell short of the necessary quota, the additional number would be chosen by the supply officer in consultation with the firm and workers representatives. In cases involving redundancy declared on the initiative of the firm, the firm submitted a list of redundant workers which was normally accepted by the labour supply officer, but subject to the right of the workers representatives being able to challenge any particular name on the grounds of victimisation.

As a result of the run-down of war production, the increasing scale of redundancy and growing confusion surrounding its operation, the Ministry of Labour, following consultation with the TUC and

BEC, issued a letter to the 45,000 firms engaged in war production requesting managements to use the machinery of Joint Production Committees and Shop Stewards Committees to explain methods for discharging labour and arrange for Ministry of Labour officials to explain methods for selection and possibilities of new work.⁹⁵ The new procedure for declaring redundancies separated the workforce into five categories of priority, based upon the least interference with production.

Category 1 - those due for call up

2 - those being 3 years or more away from home and who wish to return

3 - a) those from non engineering industries wishing to return to their former trades

b) engineering workers who could be employed locally on priority work

4 - those able to fill preference vacancies

5 - additional workpeople required to make up the number redundant who are nominated by the firm⁹⁶

The procedure had been agreed for the purpose of arranging lists on the above lines, where firms, on information from the government contracting department, Ministry of Labour, or otherwise, decided they could dispense with certain numbers of workers.

Clause (b) of a Ministry of Labour circular set out how the procedure was to be affected.

"In order to give effect to the arrangements, the officer responsible for selecting the workers for release or transfer from an establishment should consult the management and worker representatives, explain the order of release, and endeavour to obtain their full cooperation. Apart from volunteers coming within categories 2 and 3, the final responsibility for selecting the particular workers to be released or transferred will rest with the selecting officer, who should have regard to the need for leaving the employer with a labour force adequate to cope with reduced production."⁹⁷

In the situation of redundancy, the arrangements stated only that Ministry officials responsible

"should consult the management and workers representatives.. to obtain their full cooperation."⁹⁸

There was to be no obligation on the part of management to

make up the lists of redundancies to cooperate with the unions. It still remained possible for management to compile the lists and then leave it to the supply officer to inquire about the workers objections, while both employers and unions had recourse to appeal through the local appeal boards against decisions of the labour supply officer, in cases of alleged victimisation it was left to the workers' shop stewards to take up the matter with management, through the procedure of the industry. Management, however, did have the right, where it was considered important, to claim retention of labour. These procedures did not deal with the issue of consultation between management and unions on the rundown of labour.

The AEU took up this point, after the issue had become highlighted when a local Employers Association, in refusing to consult the shop stewards, had made a distinction between consultation in circumstances of transfer and cases of redundancy.⁹⁹ They had been willing to consult on transfers, but not on redundancy for fear of creating precedents which could be used in other districts. The AEU argued that consultation was one of the main features the trade union movement had insisted upon with the Ministry of Labour, in all regulations and restrictions which had been placed upon the labour force.¹⁰⁰ Consultation had been a characteristic of recent industrial relations. It had operated in production committees, in situations where the membership had given up traditional practices which had benefited the nation and also

the employers. The Executive stated that the need was to maintain the good relationship established with the Federation.

Consultation had to continue, questions of who should be transferred or made redundant could not be entirely left with the employers. Questions of domestic hardship needed to be raised, whether the worker was a shop steward or active trade unionist. The unions had to have a say and this was provided for in clause (b) of the ministry circular.

Whether consultation was initiated by the employers in the first instance or the Ministry, was, according to the EEF, open to the discretion of management at local level. This, in their view, lay within the guidelines of the Ministry of Labour letter.

Treatment of this issue was clarified by further regulations for dealing with redundancy, following discussion with the BEC and the TUC. Presented in January 1945, it elaborated category 5.

"any additional workpeople required to make up the number of persons redundant who are nominated for release by the firm." 101

The new procedure to be adopted was that the works manager would assess the number of people affected by cancellation of work. This information, broken down into classes of labour affected by the redundancy, was to be passed to the personnel department, who, in turn, would notify the convenor of shop stewards. All workers were to be divided up by their occupational classification, i.e. roughers, smoothers, polishers, etc.¹⁰² When a number of workers were declared redundant in any one shop or section, a method of preference was to be outlined which would operate for all workers in that particular occupation. A meeting would then be arranged between the works management, the labour supply

inspector and the workers representative, and a list of names would be compiled of the redundant workers and would be dealt with in order of the five categories of priority. Category (5) however was now to be broken down into 5 sub divisions

- (a) Volunteers who desired to leave
- (b) Part-time workers (according to length of service)
- (c) Women under the temporary relaxation agreement
(according to length of service)
- (d) Men under the temporary relaxation agreement
(according to length of service)
- (e) Men and women according to length of service¹⁰³

Volunteers expected individual considerations could enter into the choice, i.e. disability, family support, etc. This Special Redundancy Procedure, which had been nationally agreed for the handling of redundancies in the war production industries between the MOL, employers representatives and the TUC, came to an end on 30 May 1946. Though the EWO was still in operation and permission was required from the NSO before discharging workers, with the rundown of war production comparatively few industries were classified as essential work. The Government expressed its approval of the degree of cooperation which had been retained between employers and unions in the period of transaction. The MOL wrote to the Employers Organisation on 30 May 1946

"It is very fully appreciated that the smooth way in which the difficult task has been accomplished of dealing with redundant workers in the critical period of the transition from war to peace is due in great measure to the cooperation of both sides of industry, and the Minister desires me to express his thanks for all the help and assistance which you and the members of your confederation (BEC) have given in the operation of these arrangements."¹⁰⁴

It was in the motor industry that a series of major confrontations took place, as workplace organisations in the post war period sought to gain control over employer discretion to determine the level of his own workforce in order to defend workplace leadership.

4 THE WAR ECONOMY AND THE MOTOR INDUSTRY

The second world war accelerated change in industry and rapidly expanded the productive capacity of engineering in Britain. At its peak, in the middle of 1943, engineering employed 2,959,700 workers, of whom 1,048,300 were women.¹⁰⁵ In Birmingham, Coventry and Oxford, the technologies of the new industries were extended as these centres became major locations for munitions production, much of it under the management of the motor industry. The labour force in Birmingham increased by 65 per cent between 1939 and 1944. A third of the City's population was working in munitions. Jewellers and Silversmiths were employed in manufacturing components for radar equipment, rifles and aircraft parts. At Cadbury's Bournville factory, 2,000 women, usually employed making chocolate, were manufacturing parts for rockets, respirators for the armed forces, and aircraft components. The Midlands tradition of adaptability and innovation in manufacturing applied to both working establishments and labour forces.

In the motor industry, the production of private cars in Britain fell from 305,000 in 1939 to 2,108 for 1944.¹⁰⁶ During the war period, output for the private market was down from just under 6,000 cars per week to an average of about 40 cars a week.¹⁰⁷ The industry became almost entirely absorbed in war production.

Over 80 per cent of aero engines were produced in the motor industry establishments. The Nuffield Mechanisations plant, built next to the Wolseley car plant, assembled a quarter of the country's tanks. It was the only factory to build a complete tank within one works; the first occasion that tank production in the U.K. had been undertaken with flow-line techniques, with the content of work broken down into semi skilled tasks.¹⁰⁸

Morris SU plant produced parts for aircraft, carburettors and fuel pumps. The Austin factory at Longbridge assembled 120,000 military vehicles, while the shadow factory at Cofton Hackett produced Stirling and Hurricane aircraft.¹⁰⁹

Across in Coventry in 1939, a second set of shadow factories were built by Daimler, Standard and Rootes, while Rover built their second plant at Solihull. The production of engines for the Mercury and Pegasus aircraft was extended to cover the new designs for the Hurricane, Spitfire, Blenheim and Whitely. Hawker Siddeley Aviations built the Lancaster and Stirling, as well as engines for the Cheetah, Avro Anson, and Airspeed Oxford trainers. Alvis, moving into aero engines, repaired some 18,000. Climax produced 25,000 water pumps for the fire service, and made generators for airfields. Standard constructed air frames for the Mosquito and assembled 2,800 light armoured cars. The Rootes shadow factory produced one in seven bombers made in the UK, plus 60 per cent of armoured cars, 30 per cent of the scout cars plus the Bristol Radial aero engine.

At the Morris factories in Coventry, Nuffield Mechanisations produced the BOFORS gun mine-sinkers and aircraft components. The Morris Engines plant assembled tank engines, and produced¹¹⁰ steel tank tracks, for the first time in the UK, with the aid of a conveyor belt system and an unskilled workforce of 2,000. The 1,000 coachbuilders at the Morris Bodies plant changed over from the M.G. Midget to build Horsa Gliders, Shell carriers, transportation crates, compressor boxes, tool bags and canopies for army vehicles.¹¹¹ The factory was filled with unskilled labour, a large proportion of whom were women, without a previous

experience of factory work. The Riley car plant began to construct Wellington Pegasus engines.¹¹²

Near Oxford, the MG sports factory at Abingdon altered its assembly tracks to accommodate the construction of military Bulldozers, while the main Cowley plants entered into production for power units for military aircraft, and anti-aircraft guns. They repaired damaged aircraft, produced Navy torpedoes, submarine engines, and millions of jerry cars. The Nuffield workforce doubled to nearly 30,000.¹¹³ At Austin, the Longbridge works increased its manual workforce from 12,000 in 1939 to 16,866 by 1943. The Standard Motor Co. in Coventry had employed 2,800 workers on car production in 1938, By 1943 its Coventry factories had a manual workforce of over 10,300. The Rootes factories employed above 10,000 workers, while Daimler's plants ^{had} just under 8,000 workers. At the three Hawker Siddeley plants in Coventry, the labour force rose from 2,300 at the beginning of the war to just over 10,000 by 1944.¹¹⁴

An indication of the massive change that occurred in the motor industry can be judged by the production of new machine tools. Alfred Herberts, an important manufacturer for the new industries, produced over 65,000 machine tools. The Wickman Machine Tool Company in 1940, had orders for over 3,000 machine tools.

This rapid expansion in the productive capacity of the motor industry and its utilisation for munitions production was met by a considerable increase in the use of unskilled and female labour. In all three of the locations of the British motor industry, employment and population grew as workers from other

parts of the country were sent to work in this essential war industry. In Oxford, the population trebled during the war, largely as a result of immigrant workers to the war economy. The effect of the munitions industry on Coventry, was to increase the city's dependence upon the technologies of the motor and aircraft industries. Even in 1938, partly because of the rearmament programme which began in the mid 1930s, 38 per cent of the total labour force of the city were working in the motor and aircraft plants. In 1941, 60 per cent of all Coventry's manufacturing labour, or half the city's labour force, were being employed in the motor and aircraft factories.¹¹⁵ The composition of the labour force went through an almost complete change in this period, as the proportion of female workers increased. Less than one in ten workers in the assembly plants had been women in 1939. By 1941, one in five of all Coventry munitions workers were female. The rate of immigration into Coventry also was rising sharply. In 1939, 24.3 per cent of all workers in Coventry had moved from other parts of the country. By 1941, a third of the city's labour force comprised of immigrant workers.¹¹⁶ A greater proportion of this wartime immigration came to Coventry from the non-industrial areas of the country. The majority came from parts of London, the South East, the East Coast, and the rural parts of Leicestershire and Northants.¹¹⁷ A greater part of this movement were drawn from sections of the population without factory or workshop experience.

In Birmingham, the number of women working at Morris Commercial doubled during 1942, ten times as many being skilled and semi-skilled than were working on unskilled jobs. After the introduction of the EWO, one in fifteen Austin workers had been

transferred from other parts of the country.¹¹⁸ These movements in population, changes in the composition of workforces, and in the skill content of work, not only directly affected labour forces, but had consequences for both management and workplace union organisation.

On the 6 September 1945, the MOL prepared a report on the outlook and attitudes of the Midlands industry. The report pointed to the continuing influence of the vigorous individualism which still appeared as a principal feature of the vast number of medium sized and small firms which gave much of Birmingham, Wolverhampton and the Black Country its particular character. The report pointed to a consequence of these attitudes in the management of Midland industry.

"The manufacturers of these parts are self-reliant, if they are anything, and with this self reliance goes a certain self-centredness and insularity of outlook. By the same token these manufacturers are apt to react strongly against any national proposals which appear to affect their immediate interests."¹¹⁹

The employers in Birmingham had strongly opposed the agreement to introduce JPCs in the workplace. In October 1941, the District Secretary of Birmingham AEU, Alderman A.E. Ager, publically criticised the attitudes of the Birmingham engineering employers. He said

"While I believe there has been this cooperation nationally, there has been very little cooperation locally."¹²⁰

On the 26 March 1942, Emmanuel Shinwell MP, with the exception of BSA, criticised the Birmingham munitions firms for obstructing the proposals for JPCs.¹²¹ As a result of political pressure by central government, employer reluctance gave way. A Birmingham District Production Committee and a Midland Regional Production

Board were set up as employer resistance to joint cooperation was broken down. These committees coordinated common issues in the Birmingham munitions industries. In 1944, about 500 factory JPCs were in existence in Birmingham.¹²²

The Birmingham employers traditional opposition to the extension of a trade union role in their workplaces, had been preserved through the structure of Birmingham industry. The ownership and diversity of manufacture, and the small scale of organisation, were the resources by which industry in the West Midlands had been able to respond to the continual changing technical and production demands of the new industries, like the motor industry. The attitudes and character of ownership reflected employer views towards industrial relations. The MOL reports saw the standard of industrial relations in Birmingham reflecting conditions in the labour market, rather than the innovations of employers.

"Industrial relations are, generally speaking, good in this district, but it is due, I think, more to a relatively high standard of prosperity between the wars and a good employment record than to any pioneering in this field. I should say Birmingham and the Black Country industrialists tend rather to lag rather than to lead in the matter of organised collaboration, in the joint consultative sense, with their labour."¹²³

But while the labour market may have presented favourable opportunities for employment, working conditions in parts of the West Midlands were considered to be falling behind, particularly in the industries which gave the region its managerial character. The MOL report concludes

"I would say that politically and in the formation of public opinion it is still the middle sized and prosperous small firms which gave Birmingham its colour. These firms are mostly concerned with metal products of one kind or another, though they are not by any means all engineering in the strict sense of the word. It is the type of firm,

usually owner-managed, or, at any rate, still bearing the mark of the family business, which determines its outlook rather than its attachment to any particular industry. In these firms generally, I imagine, labour is not highly organised and tends to be content as long as the wage is sufficient and employment secure. The working conditions, physically, with which this class of labour seems content are often very poor against modern standards." 124

Despite their resourcefulness and innovativeness in the war economy and their backwardness in factory organisation and methods of management, these firms, which provided a formative character of the Birmingham manufacturing philosophy, were falling behind the changes in the Midlands economy which was being accelerated by the war economy. The structure of Birmingham industry was increasingly becoming dominated by local firms employing in excess of 10,000 workers. Austin, Lucas, ICI, GEC, became the industrial leaders in Birmingham, while a group of firms with labour forces between 3,500 and 10,000 began to undermine the traditional organisation of the city's industry. Among these were BSA, Guest Keen and Nettlefolds, Metro-Cammell, Birmingham Carriage and Wagon Co., Chance Bros., and W and T Avery Limited. In the motor industry, there was Nuffield plants at Wolesley, Nuffield Mechanisations, S.U. Carburetors and Morris Commercial.

These larger firms brought a professionalisation of management and a transfer of control. For many of the larger companies, ultimate managerial control lay outside Birmingham, in their London offices. In Coventry, because of the city's dependence upon motor car manufacture and aircraft the proportion of large factories was, even during the inter war period, already greater than Birmingham. The war economy both extended this tendency

towards size and the adoption of new methods. The MOL reported on its industry,

"Coventry means the motor industry. Modern, aggressive, hard boiled in its outlook, very well organised in its bigger units, efficient but rather inhuman in its relations with labour. Labour accordingly rather advanced in its tendencies." 125

Any change which did take place in employer strategy towards workplace relations, in the car factories on munitions contracts, arose mainly out of a condition of reluctant realism on the part of works management, rather than from outright encouragement or appreciation of the role of workplace organisation. While the most obvious war time transformation was the rapid spread of unionisation, the majority of those who joined unions in the Midland assembly plants were not only likely to have had no prior experience of workplace organisation, but were, with the exception of skilled workers, generally without previous pre-war experience of labour discipline in the technologies of the new industries. This mass employment of 'green labour', a large proportion of which was female and an increased dependence upon the skilled worker, provided the circumstances in which a significant number of left wing activists, schooled in the struggles for recognition of workplace organisation in the late 1930's, possessed both the experience and the ability to command the allegiance of these new memberships. As workplace organisation became established and extended into new areas like Production Committees and later the administration of redundancy, it was union officialdom rather than workplace organisation which had gained acceptance in the stability in labour relations provided by war-time conditions.

The war period saw a dramatic increase in union membership. Between 1937 and 1944, the total union membership affiliated to the TUC grew by just under a-third.¹²⁶ Among unions which organised in the West Midland industries, the increases in membership far surpassed the national average. In the seven years to 1944, the Brass and Metal Mechanics saw their membership grow by three quarters, the sheet metal workers by just over two thirds, the ETU more than doubled, while the patternmakers grew by less than a quarter, and the Vehicle Builders by a-fifth.¹²⁷ The membership of the AEU in Coventry was two and a half times greater in 1946 than it had been in 1938.¹²⁸ The growth in craft membership was not only indicative of the new confidence to be found among the skilled workers, arising from their position in the war economy, but was also the outcome of transfers from the small non-union West Midland industries to the larger more organised plants. But as these unions sought to restrict membership, and in the case of sheet metal workers, oppose dilution, or oppose the recruitment of female workers, it was the TGWU and to a lesser extent the AEU which experienced the most spectacular growth in membership. Between 1938 and 1946, the membership of the TGWU grew by 88 per cent, nationally, but in the No 5 region it was up by 146 per cent and in the metal and engineering section the increase was 175 per cent.¹²⁹ In the Birmingham area much of this expansion was among 'green labour'. The union could report in 1941,

"Thousands of members have gone into the forces but in spite of these inroads the strength of the union is greater than ever".¹³⁰

It was the position of the lower paid, less skilled, inexperienced factory worker where the anomalies arising in the payments

systems, grievances over working conditions, in addition to the employment of women in new industries which gave rise to rapid union growth. The very success of the result in unionisation became a spur to union growth. As the Area Secretary of the TGWU claimed,

"The war has made many workers, both men and women realise the necessity of joining the union. Factories and shops that hitherto have turned a deaf ear to the appeals of trade union officials have been organised with gratifying results. Unions have been able to rectify many of the lower paid semi skilled workers rates, increase the bonus in many cases, arrive at agreements for double time for Sunday work which was formally at time and a half".¹³¹

The initial growth in union membership during the early part of the war period, did not in itself result in the acceptance by works managements of workplace organisation. Quite the contrary. The Midlands, in particular, saw an increase in employer opposition to shop stewards. During 1940 and 1941, the incidence of employer victimisation of stewards became an important issue in the Coventry motor industry. At Standard, in September, a strike broke out after management had dismissed a shop steward for holding a shop meeting.¹³² In 1941, the Metal Products plant in Birmingham stopped, following the sacking of a steward for alleged misconduct.¹³³ At the Rover plant across in Solihull, in October 1941, the works convenor and an AEU steward were both sacked following a number of grievances which resulted in a ban being imposed on Saturday afternoon's overtime working. The dismissal was heard by a tribunal which upheld the decision of management ^{AND} was closely associated with a campaign by the workplace organisation to establish a JPC. The charge placed against the dismissed stewards was,

"Serious misconduct by impeding production through being instrumental in inducing others to cease work".¹³⁴

The hearing heard of two attempts by the convenor to intervene to prevent disputes erupting in the previous week. The banning of overtime was itself a controlled gesture of protest to prevent an actual stoppage by the workforce. What lay behind the grievances was the difficulties of works managements confronting problems of discipline with the workforce and, in the absence of acceptance on the part of management, the difficulties which the workplace leadership faced in restraining spontaneous protests. The Birmingham AEU DC took the view that the firm chose to get rid of the stewards,

".... to rid themselves of these two members because they know they were in a position to point out the serious faults in management and production and that the allegations of the firm could not be substantiated".¹³⁵

The Rover management sought later to overcome its problems with the shop floor by setting up a non-union works council. After pressure from the shop stewards, however, it submitted to a ballot at No 2 works where a non-union council was already in operation, and the No 1 works, a choice between a works council and a JPC. Of the poll cards issued, only 1.2 per cent of the vote supported the management view.¹³⁶ It was, however, the employment of women in factory conditions which actually gave rise to some of managements most persistent labour relations difficulties. Down at Morris Radiators in Oxford, for example, many of the younger male workers who were not sent to the armed forces were directed towards the mines. There, places in what was largely an unorganised workplace were filled by an influx of female labour, largely without factory work experience. Though a union presence had emerged, through the transferring of skilled workers, the womens protests arose outside union organisation. It was when confronted by a high incidence of unorganised conflict

through a multiplicity of grievances among women workers, that the Morris works management not only accepted unionisation and shop stewards, but saw their way to establishing a JPC.¹³⁷ At Standard in Coventry, outside the skilled sections of employment, the workforce was almost totally unorganised at the beginning of the war period. But, as the firm undertook the construction of aero engines, the transferring of unionised skilled workers from the well organised AWA factory in Coventry not only introduced a gang system, which had developed in the mid-1930s in the cities' main aircraft factories, but it brought an active union membership which began to encourage the growth of membership and the election of shop stewards. As the complaints grew over wages and conditions of the women workers, these individual protests soon found expression through workplace organisation.

A similar picture is revealed in Austin. In 1942, two stewards, one a member of the Communist Party, had been sacked for arranging a shop meeting without the permission of the foreman.¹³⁸ Even meetings to elect a sectional steward required the permission of the works personnel management. But as the membership in the plant grew and a works committee began to meet on a regular basis after working hours, the increase in disputes, over issues arising out of the piecework prices, saw management beginning to operate through stewards. Though the works committee was not officially recognised towards the end of 1943, meetings were being held between the Longbridge management and shop stewards over the problem of the grading of skilled work. As the munitions contracts began to be rundown, the works management conducted discussions over grievances, victimisation and selection, hardship cases, and other discrepancies with the works convenor.

Austin, like other Birmingham engineering firms accepted JPC as forums for resolving their production problems. On the 18 November 1944, a summary of the experiences drawn from the operation of District Production Committees in the Midland Region, was presented to the Ministry of Production. The report stated,

"Very special value is attached to Regional and District organisation as a means of fostering good relations between managements and workpeople". 139

As the war drew to a close and thoughts began to address the post war period, the Coventry District Production Committee could point to the confidence it had gained from the industrial community of the City.

"....that this feeling of goodwill could be turned to great advantage in the difficult transition period which lies ahead". 140

In Birmingham, the Production Committee reported,

"The Committee considers the retention of some body representative of industry as a whole through which programmes could be worked out and the present collaboration between employers and workpeople maintained, a logical necessity". 141

It went on,

"The Committee stresses the benefits which accrue from employers and workpeople meeting and working together on DPC's and points out that the vertical organisation of industry hitherto existing has tended to emphasise the directions in which employer and employee interests differ rather than those which coincide, whereas on DPC's working under the limited terms of reference appropriate to them this factor has largely been overcome". 142

The concern of the report of the Birmingham Committee was to advocate the continuation of such a committee largely in terms of their wartime role. They recommended post war committees,

"To act as a focal point for encouraging business and production efficiency, with the object of increasing the national income and standard of living". 143

and,

"To encourage co-operation between industrialists generally and workers generally by discussing national, economic, and wide business issues, other than wage rates and working conditions for which proper negotiating procedures already exist, and so build up unity of purpose and harmony among the industrial community, and overcome the dichotomy which to date has been an unfortunate outcome of large-scale enterprise both public and private". 144

As these accounts, drawn from the experiences of collaboration at District level in Birmingham and Coventry, between committees comprising ministry officials, local full-time trade unionists, and industrialists were being drafted, the picture of post war industrial relations for the motor industry was already beginning to take shape at workplace level.

On the 19 September 1944, a sit-down strike had begun, quite spontaneously, on a contract for Government departments to be supplied with the Austin Ten. The management were seeking to establish that prices would be based upon pre-war levels, and therefore sought to exclude a cost of living bonus which had been established for war production. On the second day of the strike, nearly 14,000 Longbridge workers had become involved. The stewards attempted to prevent work which had a direct bearing on the war effort from being affected by the strike. The Chairman of the shop stewards committee, Hindmarsh, saw the managements refusal to negotiate over the issue as an attack upon workplace organisation and a reversal of the working relationships which had been built up. Addressing a mass meeting on the 20 September, he said,

"The attitude of the management is one of inconsistency as we have always negotiated any agreements or disputes which has arisen in the past. We are of the opinion that this is a deliberate attempt to smash the organisation. Maintain 100 per cent solidarity behind your organisation".¹⁴⁵

On the 23 January 1945, 5,000 Humber workers in Coventry went on strike after the works management were accused of putting pressure on the rate fixers in the determination of piecework prices. The strike, which had broke out in the machine shop had spread through the works. The whole of the day shift and the night shift became involved. Both the Austin and Humber strikes began without the knowledge of local officials.¹⁴⁶

At Morris Commercial on the 12 March, 3,000 of the Birmingham workforce went on a four day strike after management attempted to unilaterally change the method of consolidating wages and bonus payments. The strikers were calling for recognition of their works committee.¹⁴⁷ As the war time contracts began to be cancelled, and the prospect of unemployment appeared, works managements in the motor industry were trying to prepare the way for post war reconstruction, by challenging war time gains. The Midland Regional Controller of the MOL, H S Gosney, saw an unrealistic assessment of future job security lying behind this growth in workers discontent. On the 1 March 1945, he was reported as saying,

"It is natural that behind many of the complaints and criticisms there is the fear of unemployment but so far as I can see, there is no justification for it. On the contrary, there is every prospect of a severe stringency of labour for some time to come".¹⁴⁸

While the national trade union officials had become absorbed in a network of collaborative committees with employers and state representatives, to enhance co-operation over production, the massive growth in union membership took place under a

workplace leadership which sought to establish organisation within the workplace without departing from a common cause of higher output for the war effort. The creation of JPC's, though reluctantly accepted by the engineering employers, provided a basis from within which a prescribed constitutional framework defined the basis for workplace involvement in production matters, on terms which were acceptable to works managements and trade union officials. The JPC agreements of 1942 helped secure the growing influence of shop stewards. It provided for the payment, at not less than the time rate, for attendance at meetings with management. While the Federation refused to accept the engineering unions demands, on the 1 November 1943, for payments to members of JPC's to be raised to not less than average earnings, such a practice had in fact become widespread towards the end of the war in many workplaces.¹⁴⁹ The wartime experience schooled thousands of workers in the arts of negotiation and representation at the point of production. It saw the activities of the shop steward extend into matters of production and redundancy. In terms of workplace organisation at its most advanced, for example, in the shadow factories around Coventry, a distinct hierarchy of convenors and senior stewards had emerged.¹⁵⁰ Regular meetings of departmental stewards co-existed with monthly meetings of all stewards regardless of union membership. Executive functions of co-ordination became a distinct feature of the workplace leadership, as it sought to overcome sectional interests and create unity within the workplace. In some plants, senior stewards were being elected irrespective of which union he belonged to.¹⁵¹ At Standard in Coventry, a sheet metal worker and a member of one of the smallest union memberships in the plant, had become chairman of the JSSC. Though, perhaps, Standard

in Coventry was the only firm in the motor industry which was approaching 100 per cent union membership towards the end of the war, the war period saw an important consolidation of left wing leaderships in workplace organisation. Besides Standard, in the British owned sector of the motor industry, Austin, Morris Motors, and Rover, all had elected convenors who were Communist Party members. The gains made under wartime conditions were not without important limitations, even in the most advanced workplace. Though stewards had become accepted in the operation of wartime regulations and procedures, their achievements were not necessarily formally consolidated. Though they may have increased their power and influence, their formally constituted authority within their particular unions remained unchanged. They did not necessarily have the authority of their organisation to call joint meetings of stewards and memberships, either within a workplace or between different workplace organisations, even though such activity may have taken place. Furthermore, managements were still at liberty to ignore workplace representatives or not grant recognition to senior stewards, convenors or works committees. They could still choose to act through local union officials. Also, the structures of workplace organisation even at its most advanced level, in no way sought to displace the functions of procedure for avoiding disputes. Rather, it worked in accordance with procedure, which meant that issues would not only be subject to delay but representation would be through union officials, while justice would be administered by the representatives of the employers. It was following the removal of the wartime procedures and agreements, that the newly acquired power of workplace organisation was to be found wanting. The wartime gains had not been consolidated into organisational rights in the workplace.

PART 5

RECONSTRUCTION AND THE MOTOR INDUSTRY

Abstract

The change over from munitions manufacture to car production and the re-emergence of a market economy for both capital and labour, saw employers in the federated motor companies, seeking to both reduce wage rates and regain their traditional authority over wage labour. Following the dismantling of the direct powers of the state over industrial relations, and the operation of the labour market, motor industry employers first looked for a period of unemployment as the instrument for enhancing their position over organised wage labour. The employers federation, on behalf of their affiliated membership, feared the development of JPC's, with constitutional provisions for shop steward representation, in the post war period. Their concern arose from a belief that such organisations would not only enhance the increased power of organised wage labour in the workplace, but would threaten their ability to defend the power of managerial prerogative.

This section begins with an account of the ways in which the British Motor industry was able to rapidly adapt to post war conditions, in such a manner as to be able to achieve a considerable advantage in world markets. The success of the changeover, however, provided conditions for the defence of workplace gains in the assembly plants. The final parts of the section examine the process by which the engineering unions unsuccessfully attempted to reach an agreement with the federation on production committees, so as to contain the growing power of shop stewards by providing a constitutional link between production issues in the workplace with the authority embodied in the wider organisation of the union.

The section concludes with an account of how workplace organisation

in the assembly plants withstood employer attempts to reduce rates and weaken workplace organisation during the period of reconstruction.

1 POST WAR EXPANSION AND THE LABOUR MARKET

The British owned sector of the motor industry at the beginning of the post war period, suffered from a number of fundamental weaknesses when compared with its overseas rivals. Despite the domination of the industry by the technology of mass production, car assembly in the UK remained distinguished by a relatively high level of individuality both in model design and components. This lack of standardisation in component parts and the high dependence of the industry on bought in parts, increased unit costs and reduced the advantages derived for the application of economies of scale to motor manufacture. Though these basic limitations had significant consequences for the long term international competitiveness of the motor industry, the British Motor industry during the early post war period was perhaps better placed than most other car producing nations to recover from the demands of a war economy. Not having experienced, despite the wartime bombing of manufacturing centres like Coventry, widespread industrial destruction or military occupation, the main British firms were able to move quickly from munitions production to car assembly. The shadow factories in the West Midlands were ideally suited to mass assembly. At Rootes, for example, pre-war car production which had been undertaken at the firms' Stoke plant, was transferred to the reconverted Ryton shadow factory. Here the assembly of the Humber, Hillman, and the Sunbeam-Talbot enabled the Rootes group to vastly expand their productive capacity and concentrate their foundry and engine assembly in their older premises. This divided the Coventry workforce into multi-plant organisations, but between 1949 and 1954, the firms total car output doubled.²

Austin at Longbridge was perhaps the best placed domestic car manufacturer to make the change from war to car production. It was already assembling the Austin Ten for Government departments, but had been also the largest producer of military vehicles during the war period. The Austin shadow factory, which had produced aircraft became the basis for export production. In 1948, the Longbridge works became completely reorganised for the new post war models. Some 16 miles of conveyers were installed, connected by over 100 miles of cable, to transport parts and engines to the main assembly lines. Three overhead conveyers moved axles, front suspensions as well as painted and trimmed completed bodies.³ Nuffield, among the main federated car producers, took the longest time to re-adjust to post war production. Its production lines had had the least direct involvement in the assembly of military vehicles during the course of the war period. It was, also, the only major car manufacturer to expand plant away from the West Midlands. In 1945, Morris closed the highest wage factory in Coventry, Nuffield Mechanisations, and declined a government offer to take over a shadow factory at Castle Bromwich in Birmingham. Morris still maintained both body and engine plants in Coventry, and a factory for the production of commercial vehicles in Birmingham, the organisation expanded into South Wales, taking over assembly facilities in Llanally. Though the Morris organisation expanded its pre war plants at Cowley in Oxford, post war production on new car models did not begin until the organisation of management had been streamlined to increase central control over what was the most geographically dispersed multi plant assembler of cars in the UK, possessing ten manufacturing subsidiaries in five different towns.⁴ It was the West Midland motor manufacturers who were the first to make the change back to car production. Austin, Standard, Rootes, Rover, plus component producers like Lucas and Dunlop, were all among the first 19 factories to be released by

the Government in order to begin post war production. The organisation of industry in the West Midlands, which had fed components to the shadow factories, provided the same source of supply to the post war motor industry, enabling such a rapid switch to take place giving British manufacturers a considerable international lead in post war output.

The manufacturing capacity of the car industry had been considerably increased due to the use of the shadow factories. In 1948, when the first post war models appeared at the motor show, output was already surpassing the 1937 pre war peak. By 1950, the manufacture of cars increased by a further 25 per cent, to exceed the half million mark with nearly three quarters of all cars produced being exported. In the early period of reconstruction, the most important change in employment in the industry was the restoration of male employment. At the beginning of 1945, a third of the total employees engaged in the 'construction and repair of motor vehicles' had been women. During the following 12 months, over 100,000 women workers had left the industry, by 1948 when the new post war models appeared, fewer than 13 per cent of workers in the motor industry were female.⁵

The early post war pattern in employment and job security, however, significantly differed from the inter war experience of seasonal employment. Car manufacturing, though still prone to falls in sales, fluctuating demand and model change-over which would give rise to periods of redundancy and recession, nevertheless became an industry which entered into full annual production, which did increase employment stability and replaced the inter war cycle of casual employment with a more permanent labour force. Between 1948 and 1955, though redundancy conflicts became a major issue in the motor industry, the general level of unemployment was remarkably low across the industry

as a whole. Of the 96 months during this period, monthly registered unemployment never exceeded 4,000 in more than four single months, and in only one single month did it exceed a figure of 10,000 registered unemployment.⁶ Redundancy in this period became largely an instrument to control the growing influence of workplace organisation. It was the developments in workplace organisation during the war period which gave the motor manufacturers their greatest cause for apprehension in the period of reconstruction, and which had an important bearing on employer attitudes towards workplace consultation and changeover in the period of reconstruction from a war to a market economy in both cars and labour.

2 WORKPLACE ORGANISATION AND FEDERATION POLICY

The population of Britain, during the second world war, was subject to more extensive and intensive state control than during 1914-1918. Military conscription, rationing, blackout regulations, civil defence activities and the direction of labour for industry, took place upon a much broader scale and was in operation for a longer period of time than had occurred during the first world war. A far greater proportion of the population felt the effects of direct State intervention. The end of military conflict reduced the need for the level of State involvement but, as had been the experience of the first world war, demands for State control and regulations over sections of industry, employment and profits, appeared inevitable. The Official Committee on Post War Internal Economic Problems, set up in 1942, warned:

"These demands will not be as easily dismissed on this occasion as they were in the programme put forward by the trade union movement in 1919 for nationalisation of mines, transport, shipping and electricity supply, and for the elimination of private profits from shipbuilding and engineering industries".⁷

Employment would be a major concern. Alternative employment for munitions workers, ^{and} members of the armed services was required upon a far larger scale than in 1918. The Committee argued:

"The prosecution of the war on its industrial side has required a large and increasing measure of State control over whole industries and single establishments as well as over the freedom of managements and individual workers. The demand is inevitable that the control which was necessary to win the war should also be exercised to make the peace tolerable".⁸

The TUC Annual Congress in 1941 had already stated:

"We have merged our interests.... to defeat the enemy and the same spirit should animate post-war reconstruction" 9

The Atlantic Charter signed by America and Britain on 12 August 1941 talked of one of the war aims being:

".... a desire to bring about the fullest collaboration between all nations in the economic field, with the object of securing for all improved labour standards, economic advancement and social security". 10

The Reconstruction Committee, set up to examine a possible post-war industrial relations policy, saw employment as being the central question. The Committee claimed in 1942,

"The supreme concern when hostilities cease will be employment. Millions of the armed forces and mobilised munition workers will need to be provided with other forms of employment; and the State, which has conscripted and controlled both the military and civilian forces with much greater vigour than in 1914-18, will fall on correspondingly intensive demand to provide employment in peace". 11

In 1942, the Beveridge Committee on Social Insurance and Allied Services recommended comprehensive provision against want arising from unemployment, sickness, disablement and old age. The sequel to this publication was the famous Beveridge report, Full Employment in a Free Society, was published in November 1944. This argued that the State, rather than individual employers, held the primary responsibility for the general level of employment. The war-time Coalition Government produced a White Paper entitled, "Employment Policy;" in 1944 which undertook State obligation for the general level of employment. The forward read,

"The Government accept as one of their primary aims and responsibilities the maintenance of a high and stable level of employment after the war". 12

This political commitment to employment was less specific than that set down by Beveridge. It was to 'high' rather than 'full' employment.

The exertions of a war economy, however, had built up a massive demand in the civilian economy which WAS unlikely to be met by the existing labour force. The virtual absence, with the exception of the necessities of life, of the production of consumer goods; the decline in building, other than for war purposes; the general lack of new plant and equipment, besides that for the munitions industries; the the contraction in public services, and the existence of blitzed areas; all created a massive shortage of goods and services. By January 1947, the elected Labour Government produced a White Paper on the 'Economic Considerations Affecting the Relations between Employers and Workers', which saw the shortage of labour as being the crucial factor shaping the early post-war industrial relations. The paper claimed,

"The biggest problem is the almost universal shortage of manpower. This affects everything. There is far more work to be done than there are men and women to do it. This is the legacy of six years of war". 13

Although there had been an increase of 570,000 in the working population between June 1939 and November 1946, the major proportion of the labour force was engaged in the Forces, Auxiliary Services, or in the manufacture of equipment and supplies for the military. In addition, there had been a growth in the numbers employed by national and local government as well as services like the Police and Fire Service. Outside these areas of employment, the labour force had actually declined by 241,000. With the Government committed to a large scale programme of house building, expansion of the public services, hospitals, schools and the needs of industry to modernise, re-equip

its plant and build new factories, the demands for labour were not likely to be met entirely from demobilisation. The rising of the school leaving age to 15, and a prospect of a decline in the total labour force after 1948, owing to the fall in the birth rate during the 1930's, all indicated a period of overall shortage of labour in relation to the demands of the economy.

An expansionist economic policy, however, of high employment, would affect the conduct of industrial relations and the position of workplace organisation. Aspirations towards full employment would reflect responses to questions of redundancy.

War-time legislation had impinged upon the primacy of collective bargaining and managerial prerogative. Government had had the power of 'industrial conscription' over the direction of labour and the right to veto managements authority to dismiss. The greatest pressure upon government was exercised upon its power over labour. Workers directed to essential war industries, desired the restoration of choice in occupation. Forced employees may wish to return back to their former employment, or previous towns of residence. Some women workers would choose to leave the labour market. The continuation of such labour controls would be unpopular and likely to be resisted, as well as appearing contrary to the ideological objectives under which the war had been conducted. The advice from the Reconstruction Committee, on the future role of the State in industrial relations, was unambiguous.

"One thing is very clear in connection with post-war industrial relations, viz. that the State regulation of the terms and conditions of employment, except the purposes of prescribing minimum conditions, will not be tolerated by the trade unions unless such regulation is accompanied by rigid control of prices, profits and the exercise of managerial functions".¹⁴

The Committee fully acknowledged the customary rights established by labour in a market economy.

"The right to strike", it argued, "and the right to individual freedom to change employment are deeply embedded in the minds of British workmen whether they are, or not, members of trade unions. These rights will not be surrendered even in return for permanence of employment. They are regarded as fundamental"¹⁵

The Committee, consequently, took the view that any post-war restoration of a private enterprise economy would have to consider the acquired rights of labour, but while a substantial control over labour appeared to be inconceivable, the rights of employers also required re-establishing.

"If competitive private enterprise is to be restored as the prevailing economic system after the war it is hardly conceivable that there should remain any substantial degree of control over labour since it is inherent in any competitive system that the employer should be free to engage and dismiss staff at their own discretion and workers should be free to seek employment in the best market open to them, and in the last resort to use the threat of withdrawing labour"¹⁶

The anticipated wave of rising expectation emerging with the conclusion of a war economy would impose demands upon an elected government for state support and provision in employment and welfare. The post-war economy required the dismantling of war-time controls over industry and labour. Conscription of workers, restrictions upon the right to strike, plus the free movement of labour and choice of occupation were incompatible with the developed traditions of British industrial relations and control of industry. The war-time protections for labour against the traditional powers of employers to dispense with their workforces was not seen to be compatible with the revival of a market economy in which the overriding consideration was competition. A system of social security would be the basis for preserving a largely

free market economy. The restoration of a competitive market for labour would endorse the freedom of choice over employment for the worker and would be balanced by the employers rights over dismissal and redundancy. In an economy of high employment, however, the employers authority over labour would be transformed. He could no longer entirely rely upon the fear of unemployment to impose industrial discipline in the workplace. The Times, in an article on Employment published on 23 January 1943, said,

"The first function of unemployment (which has always existed in open or disguised forms) is that it maintains the authority of the master over men".¹⁷

With the eventual decline in war-time patriotism and the loss of a traditional basis of employer power, the weaknesses of the worker in the inter war labour market, the period of post war reconstruction would take place in conditions of a stronger position for organised labour. Full employment did not mean total job security for the worker in his place of work, rather it meant that should a worker lose his job he had a stronger possibility of gaining another. Employers still retained the prerogative over dismissal and discipline.

Entitlements to unemployment benefits reinforced labour discipline. The rights to payment were related to contributions based upon employment. After a 12 month period of unemployment, benefit entitlement became discretionary. Dismissal by an employer for reasons of industrial misconduct, arising from a judged workers negligence, absenteeism, lateness, dishonesty, or breach of works rules, could result in disqualification of unemployment benefit, while voluntarily leaving a job meant a loss of unemployment payments for a six week period.

The State did preserve, though in a modified form, aspects of the administrative structure which had been devised for the war economy to deal with the immediate post war shortages of goods and materials during the period of reconstruction. The National Joint Advisory Council was reconstituted, to enable Government to receive advice and assistance on questions including aspects of industrial relations. The Council comprised of 34 representatives drawn equally from the BEC and the TUC. With the role of the State being primarily directed towards the control of demand management of the economy, the MOL was reorganised to promote labour mobility and handle unemployment. In industrial relations, the Parliamentary Secretary to the MOL, for the new Labour Government, endorsed the restoration of collective bargaining between employers and trade unions. Speaking in the House of Commons,

he said on the 29 January 1946,

"It is the declared policy of the government to entrust the responsibility for the determination of terms and conditions of employment to the joint machinery of negotiation between employers and workpeoples organisations. There is no intention of departing from that policy, but the government consider that it will assist and reinforce this machinery of joint negotiation if there is the closest possible contact between the two sides and government". 18

Collective bargaining would regulate industrial relations, while National Joint Advisory Councils would continue into the post war period to enable regular contacts among national employer and trade union leaderships. The State tried to encourage the preservation of co-operative relationships in the workplace. The Government issued a Statement in January 1947, in a white paper on the Economic Considerations Affecting Relations between Employers and Workers. This highlighted the difficulties involved in the transition from a war to civilian economy, but had had little to say about the conduct of post-war industrial relations, other than the hope that both employers and

employees would extend war-time co-operation. The Statement said,

"Until the output of British Industry is considerably increased there is bound to be some fear of our ability to maintain the stability of prices and the orderliness of our industrial system which have characterised Great Britain throughout all the difficulties of the war and the transition from war to peace. The nature of our industrial relations system entails responsibilities on both sides to work together not only for the common good of the industry on which both depend, but also for the common good of the country as a whole. These responsibilities are greater today than they have ever been".¹⁹

The White Paper, in fact, only contained two sentences on the Labour Governments attitude towards post-war industrial relations. It said,

"During the war in a number of industries machinery was developed for joint consultation between management and workpeople on production problems. The extension and further development of this practice would be of advantage"²⁰

In the engineering industry, the Employers Federation had only reluctantly entered into a war time agreement for the creation of JPCs on 18 March 1942. On the 8 March 1944, the EEF had resisted attempts by the engineering unions to amend aspects of the JPC constitutions and to commit the EEF to a continuation of Production Committees into the post-war period. The unions were trying to alter the qualifying conditions for membership of the Committees. As war production began to be run down and movements in labour became inevitable, the union leaderships were pressing for either two years employment in the firm, or five years employment in the engineering industry, as the minimum requirement for eligibility for election to a JPC. The employers were opposed to these changes which might encourage the appointment of workers drawing upon experience from other establishments. The Federations eventual acceptance of these Committees

was upon the basis of restricting their role, and confining their representation. The position of the EEF Management Board was expressed by the engineering president, Mr. G.S. Maginness, at a central conference on the 31 May 1944.

"When they (the Management Board) were going through the general questions and considering the general principles they were not unmindful of the fact, first of all, that the Production Committees are domestic bodies, and if they are going to be useful they must reflect the domestic atmosphere and enjoy the domestic responsibility and experience, and, one hopes, the willingness to co-operate in solving domestic problems. That is one rather basic view which we have taken". 21

The employers were wishing to preserve regulations which ensured that membership of production committees would be erased upon their long serving employees. Although they did not oppose elections to Production Committees, the employers were against the idea of a formal, annual election as this might endanger the stability and continuity of worker representatives. Production Committees had, moreover, began to be co-ordinated at district level in some areas of the country. The union officials were seeking recognition for these Joint Trade Union District Production Committees which would provide a role for the local union official in the activities of Production Committees and thereby enable union officials to exercise greater influence over the activities of their shop stewards at workplace level. Under the war time arrangement, union officials had representation upon Government established Regional Boards which occasionally had contact with individual JPCs. The suggestion for District Production Committees, however, was largely an attempt by the trade unions to integrate the workplace committees into the structure of union organisations. It was the employers who were resolutely opposed to such developments for fear that they further threatened the employers control over production

matters in the workplace. The EEF president, said at the Central Conference in May 1944, on the question of the containing of Production Committees to the domestic level,

"It is one to which we hold with a great deal of firmness".²²

He went on,

"To put it as briefly as I can, our point of view is just this. We say that the full usefulness of Joint Works Production Committees can only be expressed if we continue to regard them as domestic concerns engaged with domestic issues and carrying out their deliberations in the mutual domestic sense. If they cannot agree, if there is some point which appears to be not so domestic but rather more fundamental, there is the opportunity of an approach to the Regional Board. If we were to recognise District Production Committees..... there would be a tendency to take questions to the District Production Committee which should be dealt with in the individual factory".²³

The Employers opposition to District Production Committees stemmed from their traditional opposition to possible external influences being exercised by trade unions over the employers rights on matters of production. The EEF would give no commitment over the future of JPCs after the war. They would only concede to reconsidering the question after the conclusion of the war. On the 11 May 1945, the EEF refused to discuss the engineering unions application,

"That Joint Works Production Committees should be continued in the post war period".²⁴

The Employers replied in August 1946, that the economy was still partly on a war footing, owing to the fighting in Japan. Later that year, the National Engineering Joint Trades Movement, again approached the EEF to request discussion on production committees for the post war period.

They enclosed a suggested draft constitution. It was on the 4 December 1946 that the Engineering Employers decided to respond to the unions initiative.

The position of the trade union leadership was that the employers would require the co-operation of the unions for not only the changeover to post war production, but also for the continued expansion of industry to meet the pent up demand which had arisen owing to the war. The position had already been put by Jack Tanner, the President of the AEU, at a meeting with the EEF on the 31 May 1944, where he claimed production committees to be more in the interests of employers than the trade unions. He had said to the Federation representatives,

"You are going to be faced with the question of getting back to peace-time production. You are all very much concerned, I suppose, at the present time, or those of you who did any export trade before the war will be concerned about improving it after the war. It is said that we have to increase our exports by 50 per cent, even to maintain our previous standard of living. I do not know how you propose to increase production unless you have the co-operation of your workpeople. I say quite frankly that you will not get the co-operation of your workpeople and you will not get the co-operation of the unions unless there is some form of organisation like Joint Production Committees where the workpeople can put forward proposals and make suggestions which are going to be in the interests of both parties". 25

Tanner concluded by saying,

"It seems to me to show a very short-sighted view if you even query the advisability of these Joint Production Committees continuing after the war". 26

Until the Governments statement, in their 1947 White Paper, over the relations between employers and workers, the post-war negotiations between the EEF and the engineering trade unions was characterised

by a lack of enthusiasm, on the part of employers, for the extension of JPCs and a belief, on the part of the union leaderships, that these committees provided both an opportunity for reducing conflict in industry, as well as providing a basis for integrating the role of shop stewards, on production matters, into the authority of the union structure.

On the 6 August 1946, the Engineering unions presented the employers with their suggested draft proposals for post war production committees. The outline contain 17 proposals which they wished to see constitute a Works Committee and Joint Production Consultative and Advisory Committee. Effectively, the unions wanted to see a merging of both the existing works committees, which operated under the engineering procedure, with a modified Production Committee. The draft stated,

"In all factories or works where not less than 100 manual workers are employed Committees shall be set up and shall combine the work formerly done by both Works Committees and Joint Production Consultative and Advisory Committees".²⁷

These Committees were to comprise of equal numbers of representatives from both the workforce and the employers. Their declared purpose was clearly set out.

"The object of the Committee shall be to handle all matters referred to them under the Provisions for Avoiding Disputes, and questions of efficient production and improved methods in all phases, absenteeism, and the general welfare of the establishment".²⁸

The proposals offered nine illustrations of the issues which these committees could enter into discussion upon. These were:

- "1 Maximum utilisation of machinery
- 2 Upkeep of tools, fixtures, jigs and gauges
- 3 Improvements in methods of production
- 4 efficient use of the maximum number of productive hours
- 5 elimination of defective work and waste
- 6 efficient use of material supplies
- 7 efficient use of safety precautions and devices
- 8 absenteeism and unpunctuality
- 9 matters referred to them under the Provisions for
Avoiding Disputes". 29

The union proposals were seeking to increase co-operation in industrial relations, at factory level by increasing the functions of shop stewards. This was to be achieved by extending the issues handled under the 1922 Disputes Procedure, into areas concerning the efficiency of production, while at the same time curbing any tendencies on the part of stewards towards independent activity. By producing a constitution, which combined both the functions of the Works Committee and Production Committee into the Procedure for settling disputes in the industry the union leadership were seeking to integrate workplace organisation into the structure of authority in the unions. Not only was the steward to be concerned with wages and conditions of his members but he was to be party to the improvements in efficiency for the industry. Disagreements on either could be placed into Procedure, enabling their resolution to be undertaken by local or national officials through the stages of procedure.

The outlined proposals, consequently, stipulated that workers representatives would be shop stewards elected in the works by ballot and would hold office for a year but could be eligible for re-election. Though the Committee would comprise of equal representatives between management and workers, it was to be as small as possible, but sufficient to be representative of the unions in the works. The chairman would be appointed by management, while the vice-chairman would be elected by the works representatives. Both sides would have

secretaries. Weekly meetings would be held with the workers representatives receiving wages for time spent away from work, based upon average time at the piecework rate for that week. The Committees, however, were not to discuss matters which were considered appropriate for discussion by the Trade Unions and the Employers at local or national level.

Although the unions, in their meetings with the employers were arguing for combining works and production committees on grounds of simplicity, they were seeking to institute the new committees under the jurisdiction of the Federation. Bill Hutchinson, of the AEU, gave the main reason for the union officials desire for these committees coming under the regulation of Procedure. The main question, he claimed, was the personnel of the committees, the shop stewards. Hutchinson argued, on the 4 December 1946, at a meeting in Broadway House:

"I think it would be more convenient, especially from the employers point of view, if the Works Committee was also the Production Committee handling all these questions. I believe that because the unions here this morning are responsible for their shop stewards who comprise the Works Committees, which are under the jurisdiction of the District Committees of the respective unions, and therefore under the jurisdiction of the Executive Councils of the respective unions. I think you have far greater control from that angle. I think that there is a greater relationship between our existing agreements and our responsibilities in a committee of that description than there would be with an ordinary JPC" ³⁰

Until the publication of the Government statement in January 1947 suggesting the continuance of JPC, the engineering employers were clearly far from content with the trade unions proposals for post-war co-operation on production matters. On the 9 April 1947, the Federation replied to the CSEU draft proposals. The EEF rejected what it described as fundamental change. Specifically, it objected to the two major aspects of the draft constitution. Firstly, it opposed the idea of any

combining of works committees with Production Committees. The view of the Federations Management Board was,

"They had in mind that Joint Production Committees are limited in their functions by the exclusion of all matters which are covered by agreements between the Employers and trade unions, and matters which are dealt with under the Procedure Agreement. Thus, all functions of the two Committees being specifically defined, the Management Board feel that there need not be any overlapping of duties as was suggested by your representatives at the conference nor is there any need for them to be combined".³¹

Secondly, and perhaps of equal importance, the EEF were against JPCs enhancing the role of shop stewards in the workplace. The letter stated,

"The Management Board fail to see why the representatives of the Joint Production Committees should be restricted to shop stewards".³²

Under the war-time JPC agreement, only union members were entitled to vote in elections for Production Committee representatives. This had resulted in a large number of shop stewards being returned. The employers did not wish to encourage this development in the post-war period.

Eighteen months after military hostilities had ceased, and three months following the stated Labour Governments support for the continuation of Production Committees, the engineering employers were still opposed to entering a new agreement for post-war JPC's. In their letter to the CSEU on the 14 May, they pointed to developments being enunciated by both sides of industry which were being encouraged by the Government. Besides the establishment of Regional and District Committees of the Board of Trade, there was the formation of an Engineering Advisory Council,

and the creation of the Motor Advisory Council, under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Supply, both of which comprised of employer and trade union representatives. In regard to post war reconstruction, the Employers Federation saw the call for increased production being curbed with collective bargaining agreements which had reduced the working week to five days. The demand for greater output in industry, during the period of reconstruction, ran concurrently with energy restrictions. In 1947, a serious shortage of fuel and power, and certain raw materials, especially steel supplies for engineering, created difficulties which were beyond the control of individual employers. These circumstances, together with the Federations general suspicion of JPCs, led to employer rejection of the CSEU proposals for a new agreement on Production Committees. The EEF wrote, on the 14 May, to the engineering unions,

"The Board have reviewed the situation very carefully. They accept the principle of Works Production Committees and are prepared to continue, for the time being, existing arrangements".³³

but, the letter went on,

".... the Board would suggest to your Confederation this is not the appropriate time for our respective organisations to make a new Joint Production Committee Agreement, certainly involving such fundamental changes as your Confederation propose".³⁴

The employers were, in effect, accepting the principle of JPCs, while opposed to discussing the unions proposals for an agreement to operate in the post-war period. To the unions, the Production Committees had been direct expressions of the war-time consultation in industrial relations, despite an initial reluctance on the part

of some employers. For the employers, the fear of conceding control over production matters in the workplace and the desire for maximum manoeuvre during the period of economic transition to the post-war production, led to opposition to the signing of any formal agreement with the trade union leaderships. This indecision on JPCs and the concern by the unions of a lapse in their functions and even abandonment, in some instances, at individual factories, promoted Government action.

On the 23 April 1947, at a meeting of the National Joint Advisory Council (NJAC), to which representatives of the British Employers Confederation (BEC) and the TUC were in attendance, the MOL raised the question of extending and developing the machinery for joint consultation between management and workforces on production problems, in accordance with the suggestion in the January White Paper. The Council agreed to recommend, in principle, JPCs. The MOL wrote to both the BEC and the TUC on the 2 May 1947, setting out the terms of the recommendation. This letter stated that the NJAC had approved the setting up of a JPC where it did not at present exist. The purpose of these Committees was defined as being,

"....for the regular exchange of views between employers and workers on production questions provided it was clearly understood:

- a) that such machinery would be purely voluntary and advisory in character
- b) that it would not deal with questions relating to terms and conditions of employment which were normally dealt with through the ordinary machinery of joint negotiation
- c) that it would be left to each industry, through its ordinary negotiating arrangements to adjust the form of machinery best suited to its own particular circumstances and to decide, in particular, whether such machinery can best be established at the factory level or cover a wider area".³⁵

Both the BEC and the TUC agreed to bring this recommendation to the notice of their respective affiliated organisations.

On the 30 April 1948, the engineering employers met again with the principle unions in the industry to reconsider the position of JPCs in the light of the developments which had emerged after support from both Government and the NJAC. A central problem in these discussions again surrounded the role of the shop steward, and the Federations attempt to maintain a clear distinction between issues being discussed in Works Committees and those in Production Committees. The union delegation argued that the war-time experience of shop steward representation on Production Committees, had enhanced the importance of the Committee. Jack Tanner, of the AEU, reported that,

"We have had the experience in several establishments where workpeople are elected to the JPCs who hold no official position that they have not been so successful in dealing with the questions as those who are properly elected and have, to a certain extent, authority, as the shop stewards have".³⁶

On the question of a conflict of loyalties between the needs of maximum efficiency and the interests of membership Tanner claimed,

"During the war, I held the point of view that it probably was not wise or advisable to appoint shop stewards on these JPCs. The shop stewards might approach the question of increased production and approved methods, and so on, from a different angle. Of course from their experience and training in the past when they have taken up these operations with the management they have in effect, had to press issues which, in the opinion of the management, were perhaps not too much in the interests of the management: but, quite frankly we find that where shop stewards have been the delegates of the workpeople on the JPCs and have handled these questions, the position has been much more satisfactory, because the interests of the accredited shop stewards are not simply confined to the question of working conditions, but they cover the

whole range of factory life and activity and they do really represent the workpeople"³⁷

He went on,

"Shop stewards have the advantage not only of being practiced in Committee work, but in the main, of being generally conversant with all matters that are taking place in the factory, and the shop stewards do have a certain degree of authority to discuss any question which is likely to arise in the factory".³⁸

and finally,

"Shop stewards are more responsible to the direct control and come directly under the jurisdiction of the Trade Unions, and probably under the management also, in a sense, because if the management have any complaint about the shop stewards, well, they can always take it up with the unions".³⁹

For the Federation, it was essentially the appearance of increased union influence on matters of production which they most objected to. The Director of the EEF, Sir Alexander Ramsey argued,

"I should have thought that, to get the right spirit and atmosphere on a joint production committee, you had to divorce it from any semblance of partisanship and to get away from the idea that it was a mere instrument of the trade unions".⁴⁰

On the point of union representation, and more particularly shop steward representation, Ramsey went on,

"..... that the shop steward was under the control of the union and the other fellow was not, and that appeared to be an advantage? To us, that appears to be a disadvantage when dealing with matters that are of common interest".⁴¹

The Employers Federation, while reluctantly having to contemplate the continuance of JPCs, were aware that their acceptance meant they could not entirely preclude the election of shop stewards where such support was given by the workforce. They were, however, opposed to the signing of any agreement which made provision that elected Production Committee representatives could only be drawn from shop stewards. Government pressure, during 1948, faced the Engineering Employers acceptance of the inevitability of some form of JPC.

On the 30 June 1948, the Engineering Employers circulated their Federated Associations to advise the continuation of Production and Consultative Committees. The Federation Policy Committee and the Management issued a recommendation which said,

"That in the light of recent developments a policy of laissez-faire in relation to Joint Production Committees is ill-advised at the present time".⁴²

What was being advocated instead, was a continuation of the March 1942 agreement, and with it a reiteration of the war-time recommendation that,

"There shall be from the Federation a strong recommendation of these proposals to the Federated Employers"⁴³

Stress was placed upon the voluntary nature of the Committees but a warning was given of possible consequences, should the recommendation fail to be implemented. The circular claimed:

"That the principle set forth by the National Joint Advisory Council to the Minister of Labour that Joint Production Committees are to be purely voluntary and advisory in character is placed in jeopardy if the

The EEF consequently called for the resuscitation of committees which had fallen into disuse, as well as the establishment of JPCs where none existed. The letter to the secretaries of the Federated Associations referred to the

".....ample evidence to show that the Government is intensifying its efforts to stimulate the development of Joint Production Committees or similar joint consultative machinery at factory level". 45

The engineering employers earlier apprehension of JPCs was being overcome, through a fear that a Labour Government, possessing a substantial Parliamentary majority, might be tempted to resort to legislation to encourage the organised co-operation it desired in industrial relations. The Federation were, however, ever mindful to preserve their traditional concern, the maintenance of employer control in the workplace. In the circular sent out to the Associations, on the 30 June, active encouragement was given to individual managements to involve themselves in the operation of Production Committees so as to prevent the initiative falling into the hands of shop stewards. The letter warned,

"That Federated Employers should endeavour to make their Joint Production Committees a success by taking a personal interest in them, making suggestions as to the points to be included in the agenda for meetings, and in general to take the initiative in these matters rather than to allow the initiative to fall into the hands of the workpeoples representatives". 46

In June 1948, an enquiry carried out by the Engineering Federation revealed that nearly two thirds of the 1,250,000 employees working in 1,900 Federated establishments possessed a JPC. 47 These were predominately firms which employed more than 150 workers. The 2,000 Federated firms, with a labour force of

less than 150 workers, could exempt themselves from the establishment of production committees.

The 1945 Labour Government, while not wishing to become directly involved in the operation of industrial relations, positively sought to extend the workplace co-operation that had been established in the war economy by encouraging the continuance of JPC's into the period of post war reconstruction. In Engineering, the revival or preservation of such committees did not arise from a strong commitment on the part of employers, but rather a fear that the failure to establish a voluntary arrangement could result in union influence being brought to bear on a Labour Government for a more rigid and possible radical proposal being imposed upon employers. While the position adopted by the Federation retained a certain degree of employers discretion in how these committees would function, their main objection to an elaborate constitutionally created system of JPC's lay in their concern that such an arrangement would inevitably enhance, not just the influence of trade unionism but would install a workplace organisation possessing a defined status and legitimacy on production issues. This traditional defence of managerial rights, to maximise the discretion of individual employers over the activities in their workplace, lay behind the basic failure to translate the acquired power of workplace organisation, under war time conditions, into an agreed organised body of representative rights. The engineering trade unions, on the other hand, failed to convince the employers to accept a combining of the works and production committees which, while it would enhance the position of their shop stewards, would do so within a framework which could contain their activity by prescribing their role within the authority structures of the individual unions. It was, in other words, the inability of the

unions to get agreed machinery for linking co-operation on production questions in the workplace, with the wider organisation of the union, and the employers search for exclusive control over production issues, which left unclear the role of shop stewards in post war labour relations. Wartime achievements in the workplace would inevitably have to be defended by the exercise of workplace power. Industrial harmony, through non-intervention on the part of the State, relied increasingly upon the commitment of the trade union leaderships to the defense of a Labour Government, for the creation of industrial peace and increased post war production. As the significance of production committees began to decline with the rise of workplace bargaining, their demise mirrored the break up of the co-operation which had been so manifest in war time industrial relations. This transformation in workplace relations, with a growing dependence upon power rather than authority, was particularly apparent in the post war motor industry, where the activities of shop stewards were continually having to be asserted rather than accepted as workforces confronted works managements seeking to regain their traditional authority over wage labour in the period of changeover to post war expansion.

3 THE DEFENCE OF WORKPLACE GAINS

The motor manufacturers in Britain, facing the end of the war economy and the consequent loss of cost plus Government contracts, confronted the re-emergence of market competition with a heightened workers expectation encouraged by high war time earnings, and wage rates, plus full employment. The virtual unlimited opportunities, on both the home and international car markets presented to the British motor industry was, however, considerably outweighed by their fear of changes which had taken place on the shop floor. During the period of re-adjustment and reconstruction, the car manufacturers were preoccupied by a concern to regain their authority and control in the workplace. Important disputes took place at Humber in Coventry, and at Austin in Birmingham, as works management attempted to take control over the method for piecework determination in periods of reorganisation. A managerial offensive against the wartime gains achieved through workplace organisation in a transformed labour market situation, saw workplace activity being exercised not just against the authority of management, but also in opposition to the newly acquired power of union officialdom.

Coventry shop stewards had been directly involved in the joint regulation of the run-down of labour in the Shadow factories, but in March 1945, the Coventry Shadow Factories Provisional Committee began to push for the expansion of employment. At a mass meeting attended by 6,000 workers, shadow factory employees demanded work or maintenance. The agreed resolution stated:

"We demand that the Government shall produce immediately an adequate plan for the change-over to post-war production that will ensure the minimum amount of temporary unemployment.

We also demand that in all cases where redundant workers suffer periods of unemployment they shall be paid during such periods the minimum wage under the EWO".⁴⁸

The employment crisis in Coventry was compounded by a number of uncertainties. A large section of the workforce was migrant labour, of which an unknown number would choose to leave the town.

George Hodgkinson, the Mayor of Coventry, concerned at the growing deterioration in employment, called a meeting of local MPs and representatives of the employers and trade unions to discuss the level of redundancy. They sent a letter to the President of the Board of Trade, stressing the need for designers, draughtsmen, planners and technicians to re-convert the Coventry motor factories back to car production.⁴⁹

It soon became apparent to the Interdepartmental Governmental Committee set up to consider the resettlement of the motor industry, that whatever war-time cooperation had been developed between management and workforces, it was unlikely to be fostered in the post-war period. The most significant impression made to the committee following its talks with the Managing Directors of the leading motor manufacturers, was the general despondency with which they faced the future. A major concern underpinning their anxiety was the acquired strength of organised labour in the workplace.

The Regional Controllers report, on the 14 July 1945, stated of Daimler, where a dispute concerning recognition of a multi-plant Joint Negotiating Committee was in progress

"numerous examples of difficulties which they were experiencing with their workers who were adopting a 'go slow' policy."⁵⁰

After his discussions with the Managing Director of Jaguar he wrote

"not anxious about supplies but seriously disturbed with regard to the attitude to labour."⁵¹

Even at Rootes, the most optimistic of the Coventry car firms the Controller's notes claimed

"optimistic about sales, complained of difficulties of 'bought out' suppliers and the attitude of labour."⁵²

At Morris Engines, the main concern was wage costs on bought-in parts and a redundancy of labour.

"wage cost per engine up 50 per cent on pre-war prices, prices for 'bought-out' parts considerably up. One, three or four times as much in some cases. A fear of costs limiting sales visualizes a redundancy of approximately 2,000 workers." 53

Across in Birmingham, Leonard Lord the Managing Director of Austin, who had also been an industrial advisor to the under employed development regions before the war, could write of the attractions of the attitudes of labour in areas of high unemployment. Drawing on his involvements in 1937, in Durham, Cumberland, South Wales and Scotland, he remarked on the 21 September 1945

"I found labour problems more easy to solve in development areas than in Birmingham. I found every workman willing and capable." 54

Drawing upon his reports, the Regional Controller wrote of the atmosphere in the Coventry factories

"The most disturbing feature of the interviews was the almost unanimous opinion that labour was 'difficult', labour costs were 'too high' and the sooner they had a showdown with labour the better." 55

The employers remedy to the new power of workplace organisation was the traditional one - unemployment. The report stated

"It is really disturbing to find employers (responsible employers at that) rather welcoming the possibility of a row with their workpeople and looking forward, as many of them evidently are, with some satisfaction to the possibility of their workpeople having a period of unemployment in the expectation that this will lead them to becoming more amenable and better disciplined. To some extent this feeling may have arisen as a reaction to the war-time condition when the worker rather more than the employer was in the saddle." 56

The report concluded

".... that the employers are anxious to see a period of unemployment in order that workpeople will adjust themselves to the economic conditions at a lower rate in order to avoid producing cars the price of which, through labour costs, will remain too high." 57

The long term inadequacies of the industry were submerged into the immediate prospect of challenging the gains of labour organisations in the workplace. As the war industries began to be rundown, wage rates fell. Between the beginning of 1944 and the Autumn of 1945, the rate at Humber fell 1/2d; Morris Motors by 1ld; Alvis by 10½d; Jaguar by 6d; Daimler by 3½d; Singer by 2½d; and Armstrong-Siddeley by 2d. The Coventry rate, under the Toolroom Agreement, reached a war-time peak of 4/10d in October 1944, but declined through most of 1945 and had fallen to 3/9d by the beginning of 1946.⁵⁸ Redundancy and closure of plants partly account for this fall. Of the highest plants in Coventry, Nuffield Mechanisations was shut, while the Standard Motor Company left the COV EEA in March 1945, to enable the payment of wages and conditions outside the EEF. With the loss of these two companies and the limited bargaining opportunities for price increases during the change-over, the employers began to seek further wage reductions. Following a strike at Daimler in 1946, when attempts were made to reduce piecework levels, a four week strike took place at Humber, where management made 550 workers redundant in their negotiations to get reductions in rates. The dispute became a major test for the JSSC who saw the move as a policy of

"back to pre-war wage levels."⁵⁹

The organisation of work around small gangs at Humber, had a fragmenting effect upon the trade union organisation. Shop stewards had to struggle against the independence of individual work groups in order to sustain a collective unity within the workplace organisation. Over 1380 piece work prices were in dispute. A shop stewards leaflet claimed

"Dissatisfaction and discontent is rife everywhere. The stewards are doing all in their power to control the situation. But for this there is no doubt that most if not all these sections would have taken strike action." 60

Behind the dispute lay the issue of domestic bargaining which had accelerated during the war period. The shop floor was objecting to the rate fixers dispensing with discretion and imposing

"a pre-determined price."

"shop practice has gone by the Board. There is no longer mutuality over decisions at shop floor level." 61

Management were denying effective local bargaining and were placing all objections into procedure. The high local Coventry standards were being assessed against much lower national criteria. The Humber stewards had submitted claims for 120% on the Consolidated Time Rate (CTR), while the nationally agreed rate was 27½% on CTR. The defence of the Coventry tradition was summed up at a meeting of the works management by the senior shop steward

"I would like Mr. Cole to bear in mind we are living in Coventry, and 27½% is foreign to Coventry." 62

The attack on the war-time gains was being vented through confining reconstruction bargaining to national and local agreements. In confining disputes to procedure and formal agreements, both local and eventually, national trade union officials, would be brought into a position of having to abide by their own agreements. For the shop stewards this meant one thing, wage reductions. Rejecting the involvement of the trade union officials the leading steward claimed

"What do they (the trade union officials) do when they consider this question? They consider the agreement of 27½%. This maybe the lowest basis but they consider it a reasonable basis." 63

It was this preservation of shop floor gains beyond those negotiated between management and the trade union officials, that was the basis for the independent action of the shop stewards. The prices issue was an attack upon shop steward power which had been enhanced by war-time

conditions. That three stewards had been sacked, arising from heated exchanges with management, merely added to the situation. The JSSC called for all workers to work 'day work' until management were prepared to discuss rates upon the basis of mutuality. Management designated this tactic as a 'go slow strike' as output fell to a few cars a week. After five weeks, the firm, on the basis of the decline in output, applied to make an initial 1,500 workers redundant. The trade union officials attempted to delay the MOL decision under the operation of the EWO, in the hope of being able to formulate a basis for a return to work.

With permission given to declare the redundancies, a mass meeting voted for a strike following the issuing of the first 550 names. The position soon became confused. Under the EWO, permission for redundancy was not normally given where a dispute existed. However, the Minister in the House of Commons was claiming that no redundancy existed in the motor industry; there was, he claimed, a shortage of labour, yet the same day the local labour office was issuing permission to declare a redundancy.⁶⁴

The Chief Conciliating Officer arranged a London meeting between the EEF and the National trade union officials. A memorandum emerged which, it was hoped, would form the basis for a return to work. The declared redundancies would stand but the next wave would be suspended. On resumption, any question of further redundancy would be dealt with under the provision of the EWO. Full procedure would be utilised to deal with the questions in dispute following a return to work.

The COV EEA gave an undertaking that the 550 redundant workers would have first consideration to future employment at Humber. These

conditions were unanimously rejected by the Strike Committee and the AEU DC. A resolution declared:

"That this DC demands the unconditional withdrawal of all redundancy notices at the Humber, and we wish to make it clear that redundancy is not due to cancellation of war contracts but as a means to intimidate the workers into accepting minimum wage rates." 65

This major dispute over reconstruction began to take on a wider significance; the domestic piecework traditions could only be defended by workplace organisations. A meeting of all works convenors of engineering factories in Coventry was called by the Humber Shop Stewards Committee. It passed a resolution which raised the possibility of a general Coventry strike in support of the Humber workers.

"(1) That the Rootes group acting through the Humber management in leading a general attack on Coventry wage standards, their insistence on 27½% as the basis for fixing piecework prices is the first attempt to depress Coventry wages to national level."

"(2) That the Ministry of Labour in declaring 1,300 Humber workers redundant at the insistence of the employers have actively and unjustifiably interfered in a Trade Dispute."

"That this situation is of real and immediate danger to all engineers in the District and can only be combated by a united and determined action of all workers in the District."

"We resolve that decisive action is necessary and call for immediate strike action. To that end, we demand that a meeting of all shop stewards in the District be convened to endorse this resolution." 66

This resolution failed to get through the AEU DC. It was lost in favour of a motion calling upon the AEU EC to call an official strike in the event of the MOL failing to withdraw the 550 redundancies.

The temper of the dispute was heightening. The MOL refused unemployment benefit to those made redundant. The initiative moved to the shop floor. A meeting in York between national union officials and members of the EEF, resulted in a compromise offer to the workforce of reinstatement of

254 workers who had appealed against the redundancy under the EWO. The shop stewards were standing their ground on their minimum demands; no redundancy and an undertaking to discuss the basis for fixing piecework prices. A meeting of 400 shop stewards, drawn from 83 engineering factories in Coventry, endorsed the Humber workers position and called for a general strike of all Coventry vehicle and engineering workers.

"This meeting of the shop stewards from all Coventry declares that the Humber managements attack on wage standards is an imminent threat to all engineering workers in the District. It expresses its admiration for the Humber workers in their resolute resistance and declares the need for immediate full support. It therefore resolves that a state of strike shall exist and calls upon all engineering workers in Coventry District to withdraw their labour at 11.00 a.m. on Wednesday 13 March. It further directs workers to attend a mass meeting at noon on the same day." 67

The gulf was widening. One trade union official commented:

"If there is a general strike on Wednesday it will be at the insistence of the shop stewards and entirely without the authority of the unions concerned and therefore will be a disregard of agreements and entirely unofficial." 68

Consternation existed, not just among trade union officials but among the Coventry employers themselves. While, both publically and privately, they had argued the 'go slow strike' was both in breach of works rules and procedure, they began to pull back from attempts to confine union officials to national agreements.⁶⁹ Strong actions by trade union executives against their shop stewards were feared by employers as much more likely to lead to a general strike than the existing support for the Humber shop stewards. For the COV EEA the situation could easily be

"....turned into a straight issue of control in the unions between the District officials and the shop stewards owing to the power which workplace representatives had been able to gain through the war period." 70

The employers had doubts about the trade union officials ability to get a return to work. Attention, however, began to focus upon what kind of support was likely to emerge for the Humber workers from among the motor industry and engineering firms. Press reports on the eve of the strike indicated that GEC, BTH and AWA firms not directly involved in motor industry, would not strike. It was not known what the response would be at Morris Motors, Standard, or Armstrong-Sidderly. Local officials from both the AEU and the TGWU spoke out against the proposed strike. The AEU DC Secretary in an "off the record" opinion said the strike would receive less than 50%.⁷¹ The N.C. of both unions sent instructions to all their shop stewards to remain at work. The TGWU statement said that

"....the Council are definite in its view that the agreement so far been reached with the employers offered a fair and equable opportunity to settle outstanding claims."⁷²

This build up towards the day of the strike had its effect. Less than 10% of workers struck and these were mainly from small firms. The mass meeting to begin the General Strike was poorly attended. The General Strike failed but the Humber dispute continued, the initiative, however, had moved back to the trade union officials. In the following days, the Humber workers began to drift back to work. Some of the redundant workers had found alternative employment. At the end of four weeks, the JSSC convened a meeting of shop stewards from the District, which called upon the DC's of their respective unions to seek the intervention of their NE's to reinstate the remaining redundant workers. It was agreed that half the workers would be reinstated and the rest re-employed within a period of three weeks. A works conference, attended by local officials and shop stewards, established the principles by which piecework prices would be framed. Mutuality was endorsed over price determination and a minimum rate was agreed

at 60% on CTR.⁷³ This agreement arrested the decline in rates which had fallen from 4/10d in March 1945 to 3/10d in January 1946.

Following the strike, the rate at Humber began to increase but it was June 1948 before it reached the highest war-time level.⁷⁴

During the period of negotiation, pockets of resistance persisted among the workforce, until the conclusion of the agreement forms of "go slow" were still being operated in sections of the works.⁷⁵ The Humber dispute remained the most important conflict during the period of post-war reconstruction. At stake was the whole question of Coventry piecework prices and the methods of shop floor bargaining which had developed through the growth of shop stewards during the war period. Not only did the strike contain a challenge to employers control over redundancy, but it expressed workers expectations over rates of remuneration. Bargaining practices had grown up during war-time conditions, but neither managements nor unions could produce written evidence for the way in which piecework rates were arrived at, either for the factory as a whole, or individual departments. The strike attracted national publicity but the trade union leadership, in their attempt to stave off a general strike in Coventry, had to demonstrate that a constitutional approach could resolve these questions.

The shop steward organisation and the workforce were aware of the higher rates being paid at Standard Motors, Morris Motors, Jaguar and Armstrong-Siddeley. They were insistent that the method of mutuality could not be dispensed with, nor prices left to times established by use of the stop-watch and the Planning and Demonstration Department. The Works Conference held on the 25 March 1946, resolved that prices should in future be fixed by mutuality. The rate-fixer would 'arrive at a piecework price through shop floor negotiations'.

The importance of the Humber strike lay in its defence of war-time gains, achieved through workplace bargaining. It reversed the decline in wage rates in Coventry and provided assurances that shop stewards would be notified over future redundancies. Essentially, it preserved the stewards role in shop floor negotiations.

Throughout 1946, there was a general increase in the scale of strikes in the motor industry, and a pronounced development in disputes surrounding questions of trade union representation. In 1946, there were 26 strikes involving some 30,000 workers, compared to 23 strikes in 1945, which had involved only 12,500 workers. ⁷⁶ The 81,000 striker-days lost during 1945 had been a record for the industry but in 1946 this had increased more than threefold to reach 256,300 striker-days. Of the disputes in 1945, 12, or just over half, had been concerned with questions of pay, the majority being questions of piecework prices. Only one strike, over the reinstatement of a shop steward, at the non-federated Ford Motor Co. at Dagenham, had concerned a trade union matter.

Of the 26 strikes in 1946, however, only 9 arose from pay questions but 8 stemmed from issues connected with trade union matters. These later disputes totalled 156,800 striker-days, or just under two-thirds of all striker-days lost for 1946. During the big Humber strike, 11,000 Ford workers at Dagenham struck for seven days to gain union recognition, while 6,000 Austin workers in Birmingham stopped over the employment of non-union labour in the body assembly section of the West Works.

Strikes over piecework prices took place at Jaguar, Singer and Carbodies in Coventry. In addition to the Humber dispute, a strike over

bonus payments occurred at Rover. Among the Vehicle Builders, the undermining of piecework prices in the Trim department, across the Coventry car plants, appeared through the employers introduction of lower rated female labour, despite unemployment among N.U.V.B. members. A special meeting of shop stewards from all Coventry's trimming departments was held on the 16 April. This decided,

"That we oppose girl labour in all shops - certainly while we have trimmers on the vacant book."⁷⁷

The stewards also called for a meeting of all trimmers working in Coventry. This meeting was held on the 7 May, at which it was argued that it is

"....quite evident that employers intend to make every effort to use girls and lads to get prices down to a very minimum."⁷⁸

Though the meeting accepted that this move should be fought wherever it appeared, it agreed that the real solution to the question lay in

"equal pay for equal work."⁷⁹

The mass meeting passed a resolution calling for the union officials to resolve the issue

"That this mass meeting of Trimmers call upon the E.C. and Branch Committee to take immediate steps to deal with exploitation of female and boy labour in Trimming shops and to treat this as a matter of real urgency."⁸⁰

The only dispute that broke out over the trim question in Coventry, took place at Morris Motors, on the 11 June, when a two month stoppage of 40 trimmers had began over the cutting of leather and the covering of spring seats for the M.G. Midget. The employers claimed four or five women had been employed on trim during the inter-war period. The vehicle builders' only recollection of female employees had been in 1922,

when production levels were low, before assembly techniques. The only recent employment of women had occurred after the Coventry Blitz when a large proportion of male workers were transferred out of the city for essential war work. It was only because of the shortages of apprentices, that the N.U.V.B. had agreed to the employment of women as dilutees on trim work. They opposed their general use to lower the rate. The strike was eventually resolved after 'a return' to work on pre strike conditions, pending assurances made prior to a works conference. The trimming issue largely diminished owing to the rapid expansion of production and employment in the motor firms following the readjustment of the industry. The N.U.V.B. feared the loss of orders for military aircraft would leave large numbers of their membership unemployed. The reverse proved to be the case. During the war, the number of apprentices entering into Coach Building fell, leaving a critical shortage of skilled labour, especially in Coventry. Post-war expansion strengthened the position of Vehicle Builders, their employment prospects immensely improved, while their membership grew by a third in Coventry, between April 1945 and December 1946.⁸¹ In 1947, Jaguar announced their first wholly designed and manufactured car which would require the employment of a further 1,000 high class Coachworkers,

Although disputes over piecework rates during 1946 were an important challenge to the advances made through workplace negotiations in war conditions, the growth of strikes over trade union matters involved a more definite attempt to confine the organisational gains established by shop stewards. At Daimler, during the first six months of 1946 a series of strikes broke out over the question of workplace organisation. On the 8 January, a one day strike for recognition of a Joint Negotiating Committee, formed from shop stewards organisations within the three Daimler factories, was supported by 3,250 workers. A return to work was

agreed pending national negotiations, but three weeks later on the 21 January, the workforce again struck over dissatisfaction with the progress of the negotiations. On the 23 May, the Daimler management refused facilities for shop stewards to hold a meeting on the firms premises; 589 men stopped work in protest. Five weeks later, on the 27 June, 800 men walked out.⁸²

Friction at workplace level was not exclusive to Coventry. At Morris Motors in Oxford, 1,700 workers began an eleven day strike on the 12 September for the reinstatement of the Convenor of shop stewards who had been dismissed for what the management described as "insubordination".⁸³ In the Pressed Steel plant, work stopped over the suspension of four workers arising out of "go-slow" tactics as part of piecework negotiations.⁸⁴ In Birmingham, Sheet Metal workers at the body building plant of Fisher-Ludlow, successfully established recognition for their semi-skilled membership after a two week strike at the beginning of 1946.⁸⁵ On the 12 February, a further two week stoppage prevented non-union labour being employed in the sheet metal shop.

Over 1,000 workers in the paint and body building shops at Austin began a sit-down strike during the Humber dispute. Although regular statements on behalf of the Longbridge management stressed that the strike was unrelated to the Coventry dispute, the issue was one of a fear of management attempting to weaken trade union organisation in the West Works.⁸⁶ The dispute arose among a group of Coachbuilders who refused to work with two workers not members of the union. Support for the Vehicle Builders spread as other shops in the West Works stopped in sympathy, by mid morning 3,000 workers were on strike.

During the lunch-break, the J.S.S.C. from the main works met to consider

the effect of the stoppage upon the rest of the factory. Their delegation sent to meet the management received a "blank refusal" to discuss proposals for ending the dispute. The strike began to spread. The nightshift in the West Works refused to start and by the following day 6,000 workers had become involved in a 'stay-in' strike.⁸⁷

Austin had just announced a record output of 2,547 cars for January, almost half the total output of the U.K. motor industry. Forty-one per cent of their cars were being exported. The management were having to contemplate their principle of 'open door' employment policies with the prospect of the entire works being progressively brought to a halt over two workers not members of a trade union. The ultimate crisis however was never reached; both workers decided to join the N.U.V.B. Austin's headlong start in car production remained intact, while neither workforce nor union members were able to test the will of management in the immediate post-war labour market. During the early period of reconversion, the Longbridge plant was remarkably free of incident, with the one exception of an acrimonious demarcation dispute between the sheet metal workers and the AEU over the employment of an engineer on a solder plishing job. The dispute lasted three weeks but caused only a limited lay-off of workers, and had little direct effect upon output. It did, however, sow inter-union relations.

The first major stoppage at Longbridge occurred during the massive reorganisation which took place in 1948. The issue at stake was of paramount importance for the influence of workplace organisation at Austin. During the large scale modernisation of the Longbridge works, a dispute arose in No. 5 machine shop over the method for settling a new multi spindle cutting machine. The management insisted on timing the new machine on the performance of the demonstrator and breaking

from the customary method of 'a man of average ability'. The shop stewards calculated that this change would mean a loss of earnings of 25s. to 30s. per week for each machine operator, as demonstrators were promoted to their position because of their above average abilities. Rates based upon their operations would necessarily produce a lower rate.

Mutuality in piecework determination, and workplace bargaining with rate-fixers had become the established method by which shop floor earnings could be increased beyond the limits set by management. For the shop steward, the rate became the important factor to the piecework price. The Convenor, Dick Etheridge criticised workers who relied upon high piecework bonus but did not consider the question of the rate. The importance of the rate was fully appreciated by the management. He claimed

"The reason the employers fight every rate increase so vigorously, is because they want to be in a position of having a basic rate to give them scope for reducing earnings within the framework of national agreements in the event of accentuated world competition." 88

On the question of the demonstrators price he argued

"If they got away with this, it would be worse then Bedaux, because the price would be based on a man promoted for his efficiency i.e., the demonstrator." 89

It was the role of the steward to defend the rate.

"It is our job to see that a wage rate is established on the basis of national agreement to ensure that the lowest rated pieceworker is earning a reasonable minimum wage." 90

Although management claimed the new spindle cutter would increase productivity by 140 per cent, the demonstrators time provided a threat to the rate. On 19 August, the Shop Stewards Committee met, following

their representatives meeting with the management. They unanimously agreed to call a strike of all 16,000 day workers and 2,000 on the night shift over the question of piecework determination. It was the first occasion that the whole of Longbridge had come to a halt under the shop stewards leadership. The stewards considered there could be no concession over the principle of using demonstrators. The implications went far beyond work in the machine shop, they feared a new pricing system spreading through the factory. A statement issued by the shop stewards outlined their attitude towards modernisation

"While the shop stewards accept the policy of increased production through improved engineering techniques they cannot accept the position of reduced earnings whilst increasing production." 91

The machine shop, after two months of disagreement, came out on strike on Wednesday 18 August. The stewards called the whole workforce out two days later.

The issue was a major test of workplace organisation at Longbridge. The Steward Organisation was still in its infancy and not entirely certain of its support in the plant, even among the 16 established unions. The J.S.S.C. had only begun to be placed upon a serious footing in 1946. This late maturing of a steward organisation in the largest U.K. car assembly plant was partly a reflection of the long established separate activity of many of the Longbridge unions, particularly those with skilled origins. The right to act separately had characterised union identity at Austin, while the relatively unstable levels of union membership and the extent of non union labour, especially among the semi-skilled, discouraged the development of a permanent workplace organisation.

By the end of the war, an annual meeting of all the shop stewards began to elect an eleven-man committee. The official positions on the J.S.S.C.

were largely dominated by the leading figures in the AEU, the largest union in the plant. The Committee's credibility in the workplace had increased. They played an important part in seeking a compromise with the local union officials over the demarcation dispute. In 1947 they prepared the ground for the negotiations for a 42½ hour week, which was signed locally by the CSEU officials. When the National Confederation Leadership instructed that this had to be amended as it lay outside the National agreement of 44 hours, the Shop Stewards Committee refused to accept any alteration.⁹²

The decision to strike was a significant step for workplace organisation. It was taken by the whole shop steward body following their refusal to put the issue into Procedure. The decision signified an important move towards unified action on the shop floor which was independent of individual union differences, and beyond the immediate influence of local trade union officials. The strikers clocked in each day to demonstrate their willingness to work but refused to man the production lines. For the Austin management, the strike came just after the signing of a large contract to sell cars in Canada. The Company announced that the stoppage of the production lines was costing \$50,000 a day in exports. Pressed Steel in Oxford gave notice to the first 300 men to be laid off owing to the effects of the stay-in strike.

Under the pressure of potential losses, the management agreed to meet the Convenor on Tuesday, the fifth day of the strike. Following a discussion with his shop stewards, the Convenor was able to establish grounds for a return to work. The shop stewards had decided to accept the issue being put into Procedure, providing the firm dispensed with demonstrators times. The stewards called a mass meeting at which the following resolution was agreed.

"We recommend a return to work and ask for a Works Conference on the understanding that the present method for fixing prices by demonstrators time is discontinued while it goes through Procedure".93

The case went through Procedure and was eventually referred back from central conference following 'failure to agree'. The firm eventually conceded defeat over the claim.

This period of post war reconstruction was a crucial moment in the post war development of workplace organisation. Gains clearly had been achieved in the workplace under war time conditions, but with the rundown of war contracts, factories began to close and many workers returned to their places of origin. A decline in wage rates and the possibility of a sustained employer offensive against workplace gains and organisation in a period of change and uncertainty, was arrested partly by the rapid re-establishment of car production to take advantage of world demand, but also by the defiance of the shop floor. While the attractions of increased sales and profits weakened the resolve on the part of federated companies to engage in what would be a long and costly offensive against workplace organisation at the end of the second world war, it was the willingness of the shop floor to defend their interests and give support to the workplace leadership in generally favourable trading conditions, that gave the workplace organisation its authority to act. In the absence of any clearly defined role to clarify the acquired position of power and when confronted with a reluctance on the part of union officials to give official recognition to conflicts on issues outside those nationally determined, it was shop floor organisation which independently fought the principle battles against the employers. Union officialdom, obliged to honour minimum agreements increasingly acted to discourage a widening of workplace support for sympathy

actions. Although the motor industry was far from completely unionised in the early post war period, the spontaneous outbreaks of unorganised non union conflicts in the interwar period were already being replaced by conflicts among organised workers in opposition to the advice of union officials. It had not been until after 1934, that the TGWU appointed a full time official in Oxford, and 1939, before Jack Jones appeared in Coventry, while the AEU, NUVB, and the SMW were all under the jurisdiction of local officials based in Birmingham during the height of the inter war depression. Though the war period elevated the position of union officials, ingratiating them into the regional and district JPC's, in company with the representatives of employers and civil servants from the various departments of State, the return of a market economy and the disintegration of committees of co-operation resulted in local officials seeking to retain control over the workplace through the disciplines imposed by the procedure for resolving disputes. As federated motor industry employers sought to challenge the pace of workplace bargaining during periodic recessions which hit the motor industry, through the dismissal of prominent workplace leaders through redundancy, workplace organisations repeatedly faced a choice of either acting constitutionally and weakening their own representative power to act, or act unofficially and face the unified power of management, the lack of support from officialdom. It was essentially a managerial strategy to restore its traditional authority over wage labour which gave rise to the basic post war dilemma confronting the shop stewards movement in the motor industry.

ORGANISED LABOUR IN A MARKET ECONOMY :

A study of redundancy and Workplace
Relations as an issue of power-conflict
in the British Motor Industry.

JOHN SALMON

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PART 6

REDUNDANCY AND THE RISE OF WORKPLACE POWER

Abstract

Between 1946 and 1956, shortages of materials, steel rationing and periodic changes in domestic demand for cars, (largely as a result of government defence expenditure, and economic and fiscal policies) in addition to employer model changes, all ensured that despite a public policy of full employment, the expansion of car production would be volatile, with frequent layoff and redundancies. This part of the study will account for the way in which the federated car firms were able, from 1946 until 1950, to apply the regained rights governing the discharge of labour, established by national agreements, to curb the increasing power of workplace organisation. Through an analysis of a series of disputes before 1950, where redundancy involved the dismissal of senior stewards, it will be maintained that a managerial strategy developed in the motor industry by federated employers, to attempt to weaken the growth in workplace bargaining, through the removal of the trade union leadership from the workplace. It is argued that an important factor in this managerial policy was the vigorous support for managerial rights and opposition to workplace involvement in the process of redundancy by the Federation. Furthermore, union opposition remained weakened by an absence of a unified policy at national level within the CSEU, over redundancy, but more importantly the sectional basis of workplace organisation, encouraged individual union action led by national officials, through constitutional channels. Despite the growing influence of workplace bargaining, sectionalism, non-unionism, and the absence of authoritative joint committees in the workplace, contributed to securing employer control over redundancy.

The section begins by examining the impact of workplace bargaining upon wage rates among the federated car firms and accounts for the

industry's differences with the federations national wage policy. It is maintained that it is these differences, which in periods of recession in the motor industry, encouraged the management of the federated car firms to seek to reduce their wage costs by weakening workplace organisation. Following an analysis of redundancy conflicts, the section concludes by comparing the state of workplace organisation in the federated plants with that in the non-federated Standard Motor Company, in Coventry. It is argued that it is an employer strategy based upon the application of 'managerial rights' in situations of weak workplace organisation, rather than a militant workplace ideology, which is the central source of power conflict over the issue of redundancy between 1946 and 1950.

1 THE DEVELOPMENT OF WORKPLACE BARGAINING

The era of cooperation in industrial relations in the engineering industry, effectively came to an end with the submission of a rational wage claim in 1948. The president of the Employers Federation, Philip Johnston claimed

"During the war, when we were all working for a common end, there was a big advance in mutual confidence and cooperation between employers and their workpeople, and between the Federation and the unions, and indeed this spirit was maintained throughout the wages advance in 1946 and the shorter working week negotiations at the end of the year. I feel that the spirit of mutual understanding is being undermined, partly by the influence of left wing communists, and partly by statements by members of the Government which, although they may not make definite assertions, certainly engender feelings of suspicion against employers as a class." ¹

The engineering pay claim had been submitted within weeks of the publication of a Government White Paper, PERSONAL INCOMES COSTS AND PRICES,² on the need to restrict increases in incomes to increases in production. The Federation's rejection of the claim, on grounds of defending public policy, was challenged by the unions argument for exemption on grounds of low basic wages existing in engineering. While the resumption of national pay bargaining may have appeared as the point of departure in industrial relations cooperation, in the motor industry, the considerable expansion which took place in the production of cars, gave a new stability to car workers in the early post-war labour market. In these conditions, workplace bargaining and shop floor organisation flourished. The Federated motor industry employers faced not just the consequences of national negotiations but the challenge from within the workplace. The most vivid expression of the acquired power of organised labour in this transformed labour market, lay in the proportion of wage increases being determined at shop floor level and a growing opposition to employer prerogative over redundancy. The most bitter of the early industrial

disputes in the motor industry, surrounded the redundancy of shop stewards, not all of whom were communists. The control of redundancy became the most important issue in the right to create an independent workplace organisation, while the spread of shop floor bargaining continued to give influence to shop stewards.

The separation of interests which arose within the Federation was not so much a division within branches of engineering but primarily an outcome of the way in which workplace bargaining developed in the car assembly plants. It was the extent of the emerging shop steward influence, more than the groupings of interests, which may have otherwise arisen among manufacturers of textile machinery, general and electrical engineering, machine tools, foundry manufacturers and the producers of motor cars, which give rise to the most severest disagreements within the E.E.F. over national pay bargaining in this early post war period. For the Federated car firms facing a growth in workplace organisation, their continuing allegiance to both Federated procedure for the conduct of industrial relations, and employer solidarity in national pay bargaining, became a contradictory basis upon which industrial relations was mediated during this period of general low unemployment and expanding production.

The recommencement of national wage bargaining left the motor industry subject to increasing shop floor bargaining over piecework rates, while having also to concede annual general increases arising out of national negotiations. Low wages were being paid in parts of the industry because of the level of national minimum rates. This became the basis for trade union demands for substantial increases. In 1949, an attempt by the Federation to partly remedy this position, by awarding an increase on the basic rate for time workers and the raising of the

basic time rate for settling piecework prices from 27½ per cent to 45 per cent, improved the position of the lowest paid workers in the industry but left substantial numbers of higher paid skilled pieceworkers with little or no increase. Widespread unofficial action broke out across the traditional districts of engineering in a two year struggle to preserve differentials. The higher paid workers in the Manchester, Clydeside, North East Coast, Sheffield, Leeds, and London districts, demanded comparability. This experience taught the Employers Federation not to indulge in conceding only to the lower paid as a remedy for low earnings. General, across the board increases, on the other hand, though they help preserve differentials within the industry, resulted in the high wage employer paying further increases in line with the lowest paying employer.

In the motor industry, these annual increases boosted wage costs by adding to the price of domestic bargaining within the industry. The Federated motor firms, some of whom were wage leaders for the engineering industry as a whole, were placed in the position of paying wage increases arising out of engineering pay claims which were being lodged by the Confederation of Engineering Trade Unions because the low basic rates existing in parts of the engineering industry. Table 4.1 shows the average hourly wage rates being paid by the principal British motor firms between 1945 and 1955.

Among the Federated companies, the highest rates were being paid in the Coventry plants. Alvis stood as the highest paying Federated car company, with an hourly average of 8/6½d in September 1955. The other Coventry firms of Jaguar, Armstrong-Siddeley, Rootes, Morris Engines and Morris Motors, were all paying an average rate of between 7/- and 7/4d, while the Daimler rate stood at 6/11½d, and the failing Singer, 6/9½d.

TABLE 4.1

Annual average hourly wage rates (September-October) in British motor firms, 1945-1955.

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>ALVIS</u>	<u>STANDARD</u>	<u>JAGUAR</u>	<u>ARMSTRONG- SIDDELEY</u>	<u>ROOTES</u>	<u>(Coventry) MORRIS ENGINES</u>
1945	3/8½	6/1½	3/6	4/1	3/3½	4/5
1946	3/6½	* -	3/8	4/2	4/2	3/6
1947	3/9½	4/2½	4/5	4/3	4/6½	4/7
1948	4/0½	4/8½	4/9	4/4	4/8½	4/9
1949	4/4	5/7½	4/9	4/6	5/5	5/0
1950	4/6½	5/9½	5/3	4/9	5/10½	4/9½
1951	5/2½	6/2½	5/8	5/4	6/1½	5/0
1952	5/6½	6/4½	5/8½	5/9	6/7½	5/6½
1953	7/0	6/11½	6/3	6/2	7/0	5/11½
1954	7/11½	7/2	6/6	6/7	6/11	6/3½
1955	8/6½	7/9½	7/1	7/0	7/4	7/0½

*Left the EEF June 1945.

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>(Coventry) MORRIS MOTORS</u>	<u>DAIMLER</u>	<u>AUSTIN</u>	<u>(Oxford) MORRIS MOTORS</u>	<u>SINGER</u>
1945	3/11	4/0½	-	-	3/10½
1946	4/3½	3/10½	-	-	3/10½
1947	4/7	4/1½	-	-	4/6½
1948	4/4½	4/5½	4/4½	-	4/3½
1949	5/0	4/10	4/7	-	4/10½
1950	5/4½	5/0½	4/9	-	5/4½
1951	5/5½	5/2	4/9½	4/2½	5/8½
1952	5/11	5/8½	5/5½	4/9	6/0½
1953	6/1	6/2½	5/7	5/0	6/0½
1954	6/4	6/8½	6/2½	5/6	6/4½
1955	7/1	6/11½	6/7	5/10½	6/9½

SOURCE Coventry Toolroom Agreement
(Minutes)

B.M.C. Combine Committee
(Minutes)

H.A. Turner

Outside Coventry, the rate was lower. At Austin in Birmingham, it was 6/7d and in the Morris plant in Oxford, it averaged 5/10½d per hour. All these rates, however, stood significantly above the average hourly earnings for the motor industry as a whole, which in 1955 was 4/7½d. Not only was there a considerable difference between the rates in the assembly plants and those in the rest of the industry but the pace of increase was accelerating. Between 1947 and 1955, average hourly rates in the motor industry increased by 55.3 per cent, whereas among the Coventry motor manufacturers, the average increase was 69.9 per cent.

An important factor in the rise in rates lay in the increase of bargaining opportunities at plant level, with the re-establishment of the post-war motor industry. During the change-over from war to post-war production, Coventry hourly rates had declined. Following the introduction of post-war models, however, and the reorganisation of jigs and fixtures for car production, sharp increases took place in rates. In 1946, at Humber, the average rate increased by 10½d, in 1947 at Alvis by 9d, and during 1948, when most manufacturers had completed their adjustment, the average hourly rate increased by 9d at Jaguar, 8½d at Humber, 7d at Armstrong-Siddeley, 6½d at Daimler and 5½d at Morris Motors. Although rates in general increased after the beginning of post-war car production, variations existed between plants throughout the industry. In Coventry, the Coventry Toolroom Agreement provided a barometer of wage movements for the city's motor employers and a local knowledge for shop stewards for the going rate in the district.

The British motor industry's dependence upon piecework and its widespread use of semi-skilled labour in assembly plants, encouraged worker inventiveness and adaptability in working methods provided, and influenced earnings. Alterations in the use of components and working

methods, or changes in materials, all created fresh opportunities for re-negotiating wage rates. New models and face-lifts in the existing cars, required fundamental adjustments in piecework prices. Fluctuations in rates were also affected by movements in the product market. In periods of recession the scale of increase in rates was reduced.

During 1951, the rate only increased by $\frac{1}{2}$ d at Austins, and $\frac{1}{2}$ d at Morris Motors in Coventry, while in 1952 it improved only by $\frac{1}{2}$ d at Jaguar. This recession, partly the result of Government directing resources towards rearmament, hit the manufacture of private cars but enhanced the position of firms like Alvis, which produced military vehicles as well as private cars. From 1951 to 1955, the rate at Alvis continued to increase through the recession. It rose by 6d in 1951, $4\frac{1}{2}$ d in 1952; $5\frac{1}{2}$ d in 1953, and $11\frac{1}{2}$ d in 1954. Alvis paid the highest rate among Federated car firms, while Standard Motors, which left the Federation in June 1945, paid the highest hourly rate among the Coventry firms assembling private cars by 1954.

The location of car plants across the West Midlands, the pre-dominance of the technology of the new industries in the region, and the widespread use of piecework, as a means for increasing productivity and reducing fixed wage costs in periods of market decline, ran contrary to the pattern of national wage bargaining for most of engineering. It was the Federated motor employers who vigorously opposed general national increases, as they raised the motor-industry wage bill without an obvious increase in production.

Table 4.2 shows the yearly increases in the annual wage rates plus the proportion of annual increase determined by plant bargaining among the major car firms in the Federation. On average over the period, 66 per cent of the Jaguar and Armstrong-Siddeley rate increase arose

TABLE 4.2

Proportion of increases in annual wage rates due to plant bargaining in British motor firms, 1945-1955.

YEAR	(pence) (percent) <u>ALVIS</u>	(pence) (percent) <u>JAGUAR</u>	(pence) (percent) <u>ARMSTRONG-SIDDELEY</u>	(pence) (percent) <u>ROOTES</u>	(pence) (percent) <u>MORRIS ENGINES</u>
1945					
1946	-4½ (00.0)	2 (87.5)	1 (75.0)	10½ (97.7)	-11 (00.0)
1947	2½ (91.0)	9 (96.3)	1 (75.0)	4½ (94.5)	11 (97.7)
1948	1 (00.0)	4 (64.0)	1 (00.0)	2¼ (30.4)	2 (32.0)
1949	4½ (100.0)	0 (100.0)	2 (100.0)	8¼ (100.0)	3 (100.0)
1950	2½ (100.0)	6 (100.0)	3 (100.0)	5½ (100.0)	-2½ (100.0)
1951	6 (50.0)	5 (40.0)	7 (57.2)	3 (00.0)	2¼ (00.0)
1952	4½ (53.0)	½ (00.0)	5 (60.0)	4 (50.0)	6¼ (66.0)
1953	5½ (100.0)	6½ (100.0)	5 (100.0)	5 (100.0)	5¼ (100.0)
1954	11½ (80.0)	3 (24.0)	5 (54.0)	-1 (00.0)	4 (42.5)
1955	7 (57.2)	6 (50.0)	5 (40.0)	5 (40.0)	7 (57.2)

YEAR	(pence) (percent) <u>MORRIS MOTORS</u> (Coventry)	(pence) (percent) <u>DAIMLER</u>	(pence) (percent) <u>AUSTIN</u>	(pence) (percent) <u>MORRIS MOTORS</u> (Oxford)	(pence) (percent) <u>SINGER</u>
1945					
1946	4½ (94.5)	-2 (00.0)	- -	- -	-½ (00.0)
1947	3½ (92.9)	2 (87.5)	- -	- -	7½ (97.0)
1948	-2¼ (00.0)	4½ (69.8)	- -	- -	-3½ (00.0)
1949	5½ (100.0)	4½ (100.0)	2¼ (100.0)	- -	6½ (100.0)
1950	4½ (100.0)	2½ (100.0)	2 (100.0)	- -	6½ (100.0)
1951	1 (00.0)	2½ (00.0)	½ (00.0)	- -	3¾ (20.0)
1952	5½ (62.0)	6½ (30.7)	4 (50.0)	6½ (30.7)	3¾ (00.0)
1953	2 (100.0)	6 (100.0)	1½ (100.0)	3 (100.0)	½ (100.0)
1954	3 (24.0)	6 (62.0)	6½ (66.7)	6 (61.7)	4½ (46.0)
1955	9 (66.3)	3½ (07.3)	4½ (33.3)	4¾ (36.9)	5½ (43.0)

SOURCE Calculations based upon data collected from Coventry Toolroom Agreement (Minutes).
B.M.C. Combine Committee (Minutes) and H.A. Turner.

through workplace bargaining, 64.2 per cent at Austin following the reorganisation of Longbridge in 1949, and 63.9 per cent at Morris Motors in Coventry. At Alvis, 63.2 per cent and at Rootes, 61.2 per cent of rate increases came from local bargaining. In Morris Motors at Oxford, and the Daimler Company in Coventry, shop floor bargaining accounted for 57.3 per cent and 55.7 per cent of rate increases respectively. At the lower end of the spectrum, at Morris Engines in Coventry, which was adversely effected by rationalisation following the B.M.C. merger, and at the declining Singer Company, the proportion of rate increases due to plant bargaining fell below 50 per cent between 1945 and 1955.

Although variations in opportunities for increasing rates locally depended upon plant circumstances, the generally favourable position of the British motor industry during this period, provided shop stewards with possibilities for frequent improvements in wage rates. An indication of this can be seen in Table 4.3 which presents the monthly movements in wage rates in the Coventry District. In the 132 months, an increase in the average wage took place on 73 occasions or 55 per cent of the months. A fall in the rate occurred on 31 months or 23 per cent of the recordings, while there was no movement in the rate on 28 months, or just over 21 per cent of the time. In other words, an increase in the Coventry Toolroom rate took place almost every second month between 1945 and 1955. During the year of major readjustment from munitions to car manufacture, 1945, the monthly rate fell for 9 months, but after the introduction of the post-war car models in 1948, despite the effects of recession, in 1952 and 1955, an increase in the monthly rate took place on eight or nine months in every year, while no more than two single months registered decrease, with the exception of 1955.

TABLE 4.3

An analysis of monthly movements in the average Coventry wage rate
1945-1955.

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>INCREASE (MONTHS)</u>	<u>DECREASE (MONTHS)</u>	<u>NO MOVEMENT</u>
1945	2	9	1
1946	8	2	2
1947	4	5	3
1948	6	1	5
1949	9	1	2
1950	8	2	2
1951	7	1	4
1952	6	2	4
1953	8	2	2
1954	9	2	1
1955	6	4	2
TOTALS	<u>73</u>	<u>31</u>	<u>28</u>

TOTAL MONTHS 132

SOURCE Coventry Toolroom Agreement
(Minutes)

In the transformed post-war labour market, British car workers were able to sustain regular improvements in wage rates. The increasing scale of the industry, plus the appearance of a virtual inexhaustable demand for cars, provided a multitude of bargaining possibilities for shop stewards. While clearly the propensity for bargained increases on the shop floor would vary, in accordance to the extent to which the opportunities for improvements arose in each workplace, it would appear, from the preceding evidence that between 50 and 66 per cent of all annual increases in wage rates among the leading Federated motor manufacturers were being determined at workplace level, between 1946 and 1955. It was in Coventry, where the most effective gains in workplace organisation had been established during the war period, that the momentum in bargaining achievements was most sustained.

But even in Coventry, workplace gains were being sustained, especially in periods of recession, by the results of national awards. In Table 4.4, the effect of national wage agreements in engineering can be seen against the annual increase in the average rate under the Coventry Toolroom Agreement. Between 1946 and 1950, increases from nationally negotiated awards for engineering were particularly low. Excluding 1948, in 1949, 1950 and 1953 there were no increases as a result of national industry-wide agreements, while in the first two post-war years, the annual increase added only 1d to the rate. The wage award in 1948 accounted for 45.5 per cent of the increase in Coventry but the much greater rate increases during the period of expansion and new model programmes in 1949 and 1950, were entirely the outcome of workplace bargaining. In the recession, which hit the motor industry in 1951, the opportunities for local increases diminished, but though there was a decline in the proportion of the Coventry rate determined at shop floor level, because of the results of national engineering

TABLE 4.4

The effect of national wage agreements upon the yearly increases in
Coventry wage rates, 1946-1955.

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>COVENTRY RATE INCREASE (PENCE)</u>	<u>NATIONAL AWARD (PENCE)</u>	<u>NATIONAL AS PERCENTAGE OF COVENTRY</u>
1946	5½d	½d	(4.7)
1947	1½d	½d	(14.3)
1948	2½d	1½d	(45.5)
1949	3½d	-	(00.0)
1950	5½d	-	(00.0)
1951	7½d	3d	(41.3)
1952	4d	2d	(50.0)
1953	4½d	-	(00.0)
1954	6½d	2½d	(33.3)
1955	5d	3d	(60.0)

SOURCE D.E. Gazette
Coventry Toolroom Agreement
(Minutes)

negotiations, the actual rate continued to increase. Despite the recession and the weakening in shop floor bargaining, the Coventry rate increased by 7½d, its highest post-war increase before 1955. In 1952, and again in 1955, a decline in the impact of local bargaining was offset by an overall increase in the rate due to national negotiations. But for nationally agreed increases, wage rates at Rootes, Morris Engines, Morris Motors, and Daimler in Coventry, and Austin in Birmingham, would have been 2d or 3d an hour below the rates paid in these plants over the preceding year.

In the Federated motor industry, after the initial change-over to private car production, there was a subsequent spread in workplace wage bargaining in all the main assembly plants. Although variations took place in annual rate increases, and within the regularity of changes in rates within plants and between different firms and districts, hourly rates increased largely because of the growth in workplace bargaining. Workplace bargaining, however, depended upon opportunities for advancement. During negotiations for the introduction of new models, or during rapid expansions in production, shop floor negotiations were able to advance considerable rate increases. In periods of market decline, increases in locally negotiated earnings also fell, but such a fall was invariably cushioned by the effect of national wage increases. This trend in wage bargaining in the motor industry, isolated the car firms interests from the general wage policies of the Federation.

Table 4.5 shows the differences between the average hourly earnings before 1956 for Federated companies compared to the monthly weighted averages compiled under the Coventry Toolroom agreement.

TABLE 4.5

Average monthly wage rates paid in Federated firms compared to Federated firms in Coventry, 1948-1956.

<u>DATE</u>	<u>FEDERATION AVERAGE HOURLY RATE (PENCE)</u>	<u>COVENTRY AVERAGE HOURLY RATE (PENCE)</u>	<u>PERCENTAGE DIFFERENCE (PENCE)</u>
Jan 1948	3/3½	4/2	26.5
June 1951	3/10½	5/4½	37.4
May 1952	4/3½	5/11½	37.6
June 1953	4/7	6/3½	35.2
Sept 1954	4/11½	6/9½	37.1
Sept 1955	5/4½	7/3½	35.7
Sept 1956	5/9½	7/8	33.3

SOURCE EEF Proceedings at special
Conferences,
Coventry Toolroom Agreement
(Minutes)

The rates for the federated engineering industry are based upon the averages for the combined classes of workers in the industry, whereas the Coventry figures are drawn from the weighted averages of wage rates for skilled production workers. It can be seen from the table that, following the introduction of the new post-war cars in 1948, Coventry rates had increased from 26.5 per cent to 37.4 per cent above the Federated average by 1951. During the recession in the motor industry, the difference over the Federated average in 1953 had only fallen 2 per cent, but in 1956, a year of severe crisis for the motor industry, the percentage increase still remained at 33.3 per cent above the industry average, despite the loss of 48,000 jobs from car firms in the first eleven months of that year. The tension in the Federation between the interests of the motor manufacturers and the rest of engineering became acute. The plight of the motor industry lay in stark contrast to the widespread prosperity of the rest of the engineering industry.

The Times Review of Industry commented upon the mood of optimism among the traditional sectors of engineering at the beginning of 1957,

"Among the heavy engineering firms, mechanical, electrical, machine tool makers, locomotive builders, and constructional engineers, the cheerfulness about prospects this year seems to be fairly general; this at any rate is the tone of the reports from the main engineering centres."³

Moreover, the aircraft industry had reported its best year ever in 1956, as sales of over £100 million had compared to the previous record of £55 million in 1955. Full order books were reported for heavy plant and electrical equipment in the Midlands and the North West.

Profits in the motor industry, by contrast, had tumbled. The pre-tax profits of B.M.C. were down from £20.7 million to £11.7 million in

1956, compared to 1955. Rootes fell from £3.3 million to £1.7 million. Even among the non-federated firms, Standard dropped from £3.3 million to £800,000 while the American Vauxhall Motors fell from £10.8 million to £6.4 million, and Ford dropped from £18.1 million to £10 million.

Among the Federated car firms, the recession, with redundancies and short-time working, hit workplace wage bargaining. At Austin, there was a fall of 3½d in the shop floor rate. Morris in Oxford fell by 3½d. In Coventry, the fall was less severe, Morris Motors and Humber both fell by 1d. Among the specialist car producers, the rate actually increased at Jaguar by 6d, Armstrong-Siddeley by 5d, and Daimler by 3d. It was, therefore, among the mass market volume car producers that the recession was felt most and where the decline in the rate was most apparent. Although the Federated car firms in Coventry were not able to get the reduction in the rate that occurred in Birmingham and Oxford, the sharpest fall in wage rates in the British owned sector of the industry took place, significantly, at Standard in Coventry. The rate at this non-federated firm fell by 4½d. The only car firm entirely immune from the recession was Alvis, its rates had increased by 9½d, but the firm was now largely specialising in military vehicles.

Though the federated car firms faced their biggest post-war crisis in 1956, with profits and sales sharply declining, especially among the domestic mass market, and were being overtaken in overseas markets, they still incurred a rise in wage rates. Despite the fact that the effect of workplace bargaining on wage rates declined, trade union pressure for national increases largely offset the fall in the domestic rate. The undoubted prosperity experienced among the rest of the engineering industry provided the grounds for national bargainers to argue for substantial pay awards. The outcome of national pay

negotiations resulted in an award of 3½d upon the rate in the federated motor industry.

The preservation and expansion of workplace organisation during the period of post-war readjustment and market expansion, provided not inconsiderable opportunities for workplace bargaining. Wage rates in the motor industry rose beyond the levels obtained in most other sectors of engineering. Rates in the assembly plants, particularly in Coventry and to a lesser extent Oxford and Birmingham, outpaced the Federated wage rates, largely because of the results of workplace bargaining. The motor industry, however, was susceptible to market recession. The weakness of bargaining opportunities during recessions was invariably supported by the fruits of national pay awards. The federated car firms became increasingly isolated in the first post-war period by the demands of workplace bargaining, conducted by a growing shop steward influence, while they faced the national pay awards demanded by national trade unions because of the prosperity in engineering and the existence of low minimum rates.

THE EMERGENCE OF REDUNDANCY AS A WORKPLACE ISSUE

The favourable position of the British Motor manufacturers in the international car markets, considerably improved the potential for the organisation of labour in the workplace. The development of workplace bargaining encouraged a growth in shop steward organisation. The car firms proneness to sharp, short-term recessions, despite the general prosperity in the industry, resulted in redundancy becoming a not infrequent event. In the absence of State regulations over the process of dismissal and the withdrawal of the Special Redundancy Procedure for the discharge of labour, the question of redundancy not only became a regular issue in the motor industry but also a source of direct challenge from the organised shop floor to the restored control over labour being exercised by the employers.

Redundancy became an increasingly important issue in British industrial relations in the post war period. This no doubt was partly a response of the expectations toward full employment, which had been generally presented as a political objective to be pursued after the military victories, but equally, better organised groups of workers were more able to resist the implementation of redundancy. In the motor industry, not only was there the frequency of redundancy but also the circumstances for the development of workplace organisation. Moreover, arising from the importance of the motor industry to the manufacture of munitions, the shop stewards organisations which emerged, had had direct experience over the regulation of redundancy. It was workplace organisation in the motor industry which provided the severest challenge to the national engineering agreements which reinstated managerial

prerogative over redundancy.

A number of advances in working conditions and trade union organisation took place immediately following the end of the war. The guaranteed week which operated under the EWQ was introduced into the post war agreements in engineering. Provision was made for six annual days statutory holiday, and the working week was reduced from 47 hours to 44. At the Standard Motor Company, and Austin, a 42½ hour week was negotiated. In 1947, the entry of the AEU into the CSEU paved the way for the encouragement of inter-union co-operation at national level in engineering. At local level, the effect was perhaps more significant. The growth of JSSC's from 1937 until 1946 had remained outside the formal control of the unions in engineering. JSSC were not recognised either by individual trade unions or employers. In May 1946, the CSEU agreed in principle to give recognition to JSSC's. Individual unions operating in the workplace, would continue to elect their own shop stewards. The stewards would elect among themselves their own JSSC, electing both chairman and secretary. These officers of the JSSC would act as Confederation Shop Stewards, being the organisational link between the workplace and the DC of the CSEU. In effect, the CSEU had agreed in principle to grant recognition for a Shop Stewards Movement to operate within a district, under the governing framework of the local full-time officials of the Confederation. This CSEU structure gave expression to some of the benefits associated with industrial unionism, without breaching the autonomy of individual unions. It enabled the inter union co-operation which had been developed during the war period, at workplace level, to be channelled into the structure of trade union organisation. The CSEU provided an organisational

means for co-ordinating activities between the various engineering unions on issues of common interest at both national and local level.

The war time co-operation between shop steward organisations and employers however, regulating the rundown of employment, came to an end with the withdrawal of the EWO from the engineering industry by the MOL. In engineering, the Special Redundancy Procedure, introduced by the Joint Consultative Committee in September 1944, was cancelled in May 1946. This decision paved the way for the restoration of managerial control over workforces, subject to the provisions of industry agreements. The EEF circulated its membership on 7 June 1946, informing them that,

"The question of discharging a worker on grounds of redundancy will in future be at the discretion of the employer and in accordance with clause (C) of Section C of the National Agreement of 3 April 1946". 4

This agreement laid down the general requirements for notice, specifically mentioning its application in cases of redundancy.

"Where the employment of an hourly rated manual worker who has been continuously employed by a federated firm for not less than four weeks is terminated for reasons other than misconduct eg, redundancy or where the worker wishes to leave, the duration of notice given shall be equivalent to the non-overtime weekly hours operating in the establishment for the time being". 5

Under the national agreement, notice would be given equivalent to the length of the working week operating in the establishment

at the time of dismissal, or, as outlined in an agreed note which accompanied this clause, payment of a weeks wages in lieu of notice. In the motor industry, two small craft unions, the UPA and the A.Soc.W., plus a union which had craft origins, the NUVB, all had longstanding clauses in their piecework agreements which stated:

"In the event of a depression in trade in any establishment systematic short-time working shall be worked, if practical, in preference to the discharging of workmen".

(Section V Clause 13 National Woodworkers Agreement).⁶

In the broad question of redundancy, the ultimate decision was a managerial one. Over the particular application of the short-time agreement the question remained less precise, being one of preference rather than a right. These clauses governed the issue of redundancy for the federated employers in the motor industry. Until 1955, the only aspect of redundancy which had exercised the minds of the EEF policy-makers, lay in the encouragement of member firms to co-operate with the local labour exchanges through an early notification of large scale redundancies. Other than these efforts, concerned to promote the workings of the labour market rather than the process of control over redundancy decisions, the EEF did not address itself to the question of redundancy until it became especially pertinent in the car industry.

The 1946 National Agreement in Engineering claimed back the employers right to unfettered control over redundancy, subject only to the terms of notice. Employees had the entitlement to a weeks notice, or the payment of wages in lieu, but had lost the

involvement of the MOL and the prescribed role for workplace organisation in the process of redundancy. The question of the future handling of redundancy by federated companies was raised in a central conference reference, after a South London Engineering firm had posted the following notice in its works on 4 May 1946.

"Formal notice is hereby given to the termination of the redundancy agreement of January 28, 1945 on the 4 May 1946 coinciding with the de-scheduling of this firm and the withdrawing of the EWO".⁷

The shop floor representatives approached the works management with a proposal for the regulation of redundancy in the post war period. Their suggestions were largely based upon the agreed procedures which had operated over the war-time redundancies. The forward to their proposals stated:

"With a view to continuing the policy of co-operation between work people and management the following is suggested as an appropriate method for dealing with redundancy should the issue of work not warrant the continued employment of the present number of employees".⁸

The redundancy proposal contains three clauses.

- "1. If at any time it is necessary to reduce the staff of a particular grade of work the following categories should go in order.
 - a) volunteers, (b) workers registered under TRA,
 - (c) workers according to length of service as section 5 of the agreement of 26 January 1945.
2. No workers should be discharged until the appropriate shop steward or shop stewards convenor has been

consulted as under the provision for the avoidance of disputes.

3. The management and foreman to refer all cases of absenteeism, misbehaviour etc, to the JPC, or a sub-committee thereof, or alternatively the appropriate shop steward or the shop steward convenor".⁹

Drawing upon the experience of the Special Redundancy Agreement, the London proposal suggested the continuation of union-management co-operation upon the basis of a distinctive involvement of workplace representatives. The proposal set out an order of job rights to employment, for the workforce and specified a role for the workplace organisation on the operation of redundancy and the handling of discipline at work. The intention was not that this proposal should replace the Managerial Functions agreement but rather, the co-operative spirit within which it could operate would remove the need to resort to issues having to be decided outside the works through the Procedure Agreement. The unions argued their approach,

"Should facilitate immediate understanding so in most cases it will not be necessary to take the matter beyond the works, thus preventing delay and hardship to any workers concerned".¹⁰

When the proposals were presented at Central Conference all trade union officials saw them as,

"An attempt to prevent a deterioration in relations to the pre-war position in order to promote confidence, mutual trust, resulting in an increase in the efficiency of industry".¹¹

The redundancy proposal did not deny managements right to the determination of its own workforce, but merely established provisions that in cases of redundancy, decisions would not be implemented without consulting the workplace organisation.

For the employers, the signing of the dismissal clause reestablished their traditional status over labour. The proposal was suggesting that shop stewards should have a continual role in a traditional concern of management. The employers view was that war-time conditions had been replaced by the return of a market economy and the restoration of the free movement of labour. There were, therefore, no parallels with the war economy. The Special Redundancy Agreement had been designed to meet exceptional circumstances; the large scale run down of the munitions industries. Adjustments of labour in the post war world were envisaged as being on a much smaller scale. The employers neither required a special procedure or an agreed involvement of shop stewards. In the larger firms, the development of personnel managers, welfare officers and labour officers, it was argued, gave employers the capability of knowing the personal circumstances of their workers. Therefore, the shop stewards role was not really necessary in this area. As it was thought the majority of post-war dismissals were likely to arise from the suitability of individual workers, this was a managerial decision which could not be shared with shop stewards.

The EEF's view, which was taken as an indication of post war attitudes, was seen by the unions as a reiteration of the traditional pre war position,

From 1946 to 1950, this question of managerial control over redundancy came under repeated stress, particularly in the motor industry where, despite the general level of full employment, and shortages of labour, the incidence of redundancy became common place. Without an agreed procedure which enlisted the shop stewards, redundancy became a source of acute strife as workplace bargaining and shop steward organisations began to spread. The federated employers' attempts to apply their authority bestowed in national agreements, came under increasing pressure from the shop floor. In the early post war period, redundancy became an inevitable reflection of the degree of growing unionisation among workforces. The challenge towards employer control of redundancy was indicative of the growing importance of workplace organisation in the federated car firms.

Table 4.6 gives a breakdown of the underlying issues which arose in redundancy strikes among the main car firms, between 1947 and 1956. The analysis of redundancy disputes has been undertaken through an application of the DE revised Stoppages Relating to Redundancy cause-classification, established in 1973. In applying these categories to this earlier period, it can be seen that 16, or 36.3 per cent, of all redundancy stoppages arose as a response to a management decision to declare a redundancy or threaten a redundancy, (Cause 1 and 2); while 28, or 61.3 per cent of all redundancy strikes primarily involved issues connected with the handling of redundancy, (cause 3 to 9).

The major factor in the redundancy strikes was the number of stoppages which occurred owing to the selection of workplace representatives in redundancy situations. This, (cause 4), accounted for 17 disputes, or 38.7 per cent of all redundancy

TABLE 4.6 - REDUNDANCY STRIKES IN THE MOTOR INDUSTRY (MLH 381)CAUSAL ANALYSIS OF PRIMARY ISSUES 1947-1956

<u>STRIKE CAUSE</u>	<u>NO STRIKES</u>	<u>(PER CENT)</u>
1 Against feared or proposed redundancy or plant closure	13	(29.5)
2 Demands for reinstatement of redundant workers	3	(6.8)
3 Insufficient consultation or adequate warning	3	(6.8)
4 Against selection of union officials members of factory committees, shop stewards, convenors.	17	(38.7)
5 Other "first-to-go" disputes including demands for non-union labour before union members.	1	(2.3)
6 Over short time working, working sharing or lay-off as alternative to redundancy	2	(4.5)
7 Over redeployment or transfer of workers, as result of redundancy	1	(2.3)
8 Against engagement of additional workers during actual or threatened redundancy	3	(6.8)
9 Over introduction, or revised procedure agreements or procedural practices regulating redundancy	1	(2.3)
	<hr/>	<hr/>
TOTALS	44	(100)

SOURCE: DE

strikes during the period. Conflict over the selection of work place representatives outweighed, opposition to a proposed or actual redundancy, and to demands by workforces for alternatives to redundancy. Thirteen disputes arose against feared or proposed redundancy or plant closure, including cases where notice of redundancy had been served. Only two strikes arose over demands for short-time working or work sharing as an alternative to redundancy.

In Table 4.7, figures are presented for the number of striker-days lost through redundancy strikes in the motor industry. These figures are an indication of the scale or duration of the actual strikes. This table reveals that opposition to the actual redundancy decision is far less intense than the opposition to the actual handling of the redundancy. Cause (1) and (2) account for 29.9 per cent of all striker-days, while cause (3) to (9) measuring the striker-days lost over the manner of handling redundancy; total 70 per cent of all striker-days for the period. In terms of the number of striker-days lost, causes (1) and (2) total 345,900 days, compared to 810,050 striker-days lost for causes (3) to (9) inclusive.

What is perhaps the most dominant feature of all, is the proportion of striker-days lost involving the 'selection of union officials, members of factory committees, shop stewards, convenors'. This accounts for 654,600 striker-days, equivalent to more than half the total striker-days for the whole ten years of redundancy strikes. The conflict registered through these strike figures involving workplace representatives in redundancy situations, considerably outweighed opposition to a proposed or actual

TABLE 4.7 - REDUNDANCY STRIKER-DAYS IN THE MOTOR INDUSTRY(MLH 381) CAUSAL ANALYSIS OF PRIMARY ISSUES 1947-1956

<u>STRIKE CAUSE</u>	(000) <u>STRIKER-DAYS</u>	<u>(PER CENT)</u>
1 Against feared or proposed redundancy or plant closure	256.3	22.2
2 Demands for reinstatement of redundant workers	89.6	7.8
3 Insufficient consultation or adequate warning	6.1	0.5
4 Against selection of union officials, members of factory committees, shop stewards, convenors	654.6	56.6
5 Other "first-to-go" disputes including demands for non union labour before union members	3.5	0.3
6 Over short-time working, work sharing or lay-off as alternatives to redundancy	139.6	12.0
7 Over redeployment or transfer of workers, as result of redundancy	0.06	0.0
8 Against engagement of additional workers during actual or threatened redundancy	5.79	0.5
9 Over introduction, or revised procedure agreements, or procedural practices regulating redundancy	0.4	0.1
	<hr/> 1,155.95	<hr/> (100.0)

SOURCE: DE

redundancy, and to the intensity of opposition to proposed or actual redundancies. It resulted in 56.6 per cent of all striker-days, compared to 256,300 or 22.2 per cent of striker-days against feared or proposed redundancy; and 89,600 striker-days, or 7.8 per cent of the total striker-days, for demands for reinstatement of redundant workers. Only 12 per cent of striker-days, or 139,600 striker-days, involved disputes over short-time working demands, work sharing or temporary lay-offs, as alternatives to redundancy.

The general picture revealed by these two tables suggests the workforces, between 1947 and 1956, did not generally aspire to oppose redundancy as such, but more the method or manner with which redundancy was being carried out. It is important to exercise caution when interpreting statistics, for it could possibly be argued in this case that all redundancy strikes, *ipso facto*, were strikes against redundancy. An element of this is undoubtedly true. What is being analysed here is the main, or primary cause, which is being identified, and not secondary or subsidiary causes. Therefore, at this stage only general observation can be drawn.

The preponderance of strikes and striker-days over the selection of workplace representatives suggests that while there was less of a sustained challenge to the legitimacy of management's role over redundancy, even with an expectation of full employment among workforces, there is a definite opposition to managerial attempts to weaken workplace organisation, through the control of redundancy. So, although workforces may not have considered they possessed a right or power to effectively oppose the authority of management, prescribed by the national agreement of 3 April 1946,

willing to accept managements authority to discharge workplace representatives.

The productive base of the motor industry expanded following the conversion from munitions to car assembly. In 1947, however, the output of cars fell below the level of 1935. A serious fuel crisis in the first three months of the year and a scarcity of vital materials and equipment, left the industry averaging between only 75 to 80 per cent of capacity. The particular shortages of steel to the industry and difficulties in acquiring jigs and machine tools resulted in an increase in unemployment. Registered unemployed in the industry rose from 11,429 in December 1946, to 56,679 by March 1947.

Trade union concern lay in the fear that the increases in unemployment were providing opportunities to victimise shop stewards. At the first quarterly meeting of Coventry AEU shop stewards, calls were being made for the right of appeal in cases of redundancy to an MOL independent tribunal^{And} for employees to consult with shop stewards over engagement or dismissal of workforces. The stewards were also asking for legal protection and compulsory recognition of shop stewards and convenors, and for legislation to prevent employers operating black lists of workers. These proposals had followed a series of complaints about cases of victimisation which had taken place in Coventry. During the spring of 1947, the COV CSEU had received protests from 18 trade union branches, numerous shop stewards committees, plus the TGWU DC, over incidents of victimisation of trade unionists.¹³ In July 1947, the COV CSEU District Secretary, Jack Jones, referring to the incidence of victimisation, called upon the City's shop stewards to develop ways and means of protecting trade

often concealed victimisation by clever manoeuvring. In Oxford, the closure of Morris Radiators during the fuel crisis resulted in the loss of three prominent members of the shop stewards committee, including the AEU convenor and chairman of the JSSC, Norman Brown. He and two other shop stewards, Alf Goldsmith and Henry Rimmer, were not offered employment when production¹⁴ restarted after the four week closure. During these early post war years, a number of small redundancy disputes arose in which federated management refused to concede the question of prior consultation with shop steward organisations.

At the Humber works in Coventry, shortages of materials had combined with disagreements over piecework prices in the trim section of the Sunbeam-Talbot line. As the production levels fell, the management dismissed 59 members of the NUVB including the union's shop steward and Chief shop steward. The outcome was a strike of 68 trimmers which lasted 26 days. Out of the big strike in 1946, the vehicle builders argued that the management had agreed a procedure in cases of redundancy. The employers representatives claimed that the management stated they would merely give a list of redundant workers to the shop steward of the section involved, once the redundancy notices had been given. With the two stewards dismissed and a 'go-slow' in the trim section, the union argued that there was little hope of resolving either the strike or the piece-work price issue. Under pressure of the production lines "drying up", the Company agreed to reconsider the reappointment of the Chief Steward provided this was taken as a gesture towards resolving the piecework differences. No guarantee could be given surrounding other dismissed workers until production had been fully restored.

Following a return to work, a Works Conference was held with the officials of the CSEU over the question of future redundancy procedure. The Humber management made clear it stood by the National Agreement; that if work was not available, workers would be laid off, without entitlement to the guaranteed week. It was, however, conceded that where future redundancy arose, shop stewards of sections involved would be given the names of the dismissed workers once notices had been issued and the right to propose substitutes for dismissed workers could take place during the period of notice, even in instances where wages had been paid in lieu of notice.¹⁵ These proposals became the COV EEA policy for the handling of redundancy but fell short of the prior consultation with shop stewards which had operated with the redundancy of munition workers. From this first experience of post war redundancy, the role of workplace organisation began to increasingly appear as the major question underlying redundancy issues.

At the Rover factory in Birmingham, it was an arrangement with the NUVB to overcome the shortages of skilled trimmers which gave rise to a strike of 60 vehicle builders following a redundancy of 5 workers. Rover had moved their car assembly out of Coventry to their Shadow factory at Solihull in Birmingham, owing to the war damage at their Coventry premises.. The general shortage of vehicle builders became particularly apparent among the specialist car firms once car production began to expand. At the Solihull factory, the shop steward organisation had been unable to get the management to set up a JPC for post war production. After 18 months of protracted discussions, the local officials had raised the matter with their MPs.¹⁶ To overcome the anticipated shortage

of trimmers, the management had agreed with the NUVB to the setting up of a training school to increase the supply of available workers. Under the scheme, the vehicle builders had agreed to the employment of trainees at the semi-skilled rate until they had acquired sufficient experience and ability to carry out the fully rated jobs. During the arrangements for setting up the school, assurances had been given by the firm regarding the position of skilled vehicle builders. Given the standard of coach work at the Rover, the management had informed the union that they would always require a large proportion of skilled workers. In the fall-off in production during 1947, however, the management declared 5 vehicle builders redundant on the 29 October. Two were fully rated employees and three were trainees. The workers in the trim department did not question the need for the redundancy but were challenging the redundancy of the skilled workers, while other trainees remained in the shop. Elsworth, the NUVB Birmingham area organiser, who had been party to the training scheme negotiations stated:

"I think I can say this quite confidently, that unless we had had some assurances that the rate of the skilled men and the position of the skilled men would be safeguarded, I do not think we could have persuaded our members in any department to accept this scheme.... on that basis, and that basis alone, the safeguarding of the position of our skilled men, that we have been able to get them to accept the scheme and to work along with trainees".¹⁷

The issue for the vehicle builders was their traditional control over the coach building assembly shop. In The Rover, Elsworth claimed they had:

"always been regarded a skilled man's shop, - that is, as far as the coach side is concerned".¹⁸

It was the shortage of skilled trimmers which had led to semi-skilled trainees in the shop. The management were seeking to exercise their rights over redundancy. Their criteria challenged the notion of a 'union shop'. The issue for the management was the capability of the workers involved. Agreements governing the employment of semi-skilled workers did not state that they should be declared redundant before skilled workers, nor did they accept that any section of the works should be considered for union members only. Employment in any particular shop, the management argued, depended upon the nature of the work. Although a return to work had taken place after a three day strike, to enable the issue to be placed with procedure, an eventual informal settlement at workplace level was reached following management assurances that the two skilled workers would have preference to future employment.

The Rover dispute raised important aspects of craft unionism still being defended among the vehicle builders. The two skilled workers declared redundant had worked at coach building since 1918, following a seven year apprenticeship. Mass production techniques had had a considerable effect upon the workmanship employed on volume car production. Among the specialist car manufacturers, like Rover, Daimler, Jaguar, Alvis and Armstrong-Siddeley, a high standard of craftmanship was still being utilised. In the body and trim sections of these firms, vehicle builders still held an attachment to the craft traditions of their union. The fall in apprenticeship for coachwork, during the war period, and the expansion and modernisation of production after 1946, created shortages of vehicle builders. The NUVB, being unable to supply sufficient numbers of union members to the industry, agreed to accept semi-skilled trainees. While the membership in

the shop were prepared to tolerate these developments, they did so while defending their craft status. They demanded preference for their apprenticed members before trainees who had been in the motor industry for less than eighteen months. Craft aspirations among the vehicle builders remained a characteristic of their workplace organisation despite the evident decline in job skills, through mass production technology. The nature of their craft unionism transformed with changes in technology. It lay less in the practice of a craft tradition in work but more in the right to exclusively organise the workforces in the coach building sections of assembly and preserve the skilled rate. The vehicle builders official stated during the Rover Local Conference:

"I am going to submit that during all those discussions what was uppermost in our minds and in the minds of our members employed at the Rover Company, was the danger which they saw to the rate of the skilled men".¹⁹

For the vehicle builders the:

"....men is rated not the position"²⁰

The control of redundancy implied a control over opportunities to alter the rate through changing the balance of work undertaken in the coach building shops. The stoppage was therefore a direct challenge to management selection undertaken without prior consultation with the shop floor representatives. In their defence of the rate, the vehicle builders were questioning management rights to determine redundancy on the basis of work content, skill levels and employees aptitude, and general record with the firm. These considerations were secondary factors to the defence

During these early post war years, the federated managements were attempting to exercise their authority over the determination of their workforces. They were refusing to enter into any arrangements for prior consultation with shop stewards for fear of compromising their right to choose and discharge labour. If grievances arose, they could be channelled through the avoidance of disputes procedure. For the unions involved, the procedure could give little comfort to their discontent. Apart from the inevitable delay in being able to respond to what were immediate issues, the agreements governing dismissal gave management the right to decide. Unofficial action in the workplace became inevitable.

Forty five engineers at Carbodies struck, on the 6 November, for two days, after the management had made redundant 17 AEU members, while at the same time starting a former employee, who was not a member of the union.²¹ The local officials' attempts to get the non-unionist removed from his job in the toolroom failed during their negotiations with management, after a return to work. The management had been willing to take the issue to arbitration but neither party could agree upon the terms of reference.

The shortages of supplies to the motor industry, plus the introduction by car firms of new models, was resulting in management dismissing workers. Towards the end of 1947, the car manufacturers were becoming increasingly pessimistic over the future rationing of steel to the industry. In December, the motor manufacturers were forecasting a fall in production in 1948 to 260,000 cars, about two thirds of the capacity for the industry. The Government were attempting to get the car firms to rationalise their model range and standardise their use of components in order to make

British cars more competitive for export markets. In November 1947, the MOS suggested that each manufacturer should concentrate upon one proven model of car which should be attractive for export. Behind the proposal lay an attempt to conserve the use of steel used by the industry, while encouraging car firms to overcome some of their basic deficiencies. Car tax was altered to encourage the manufacture of larger engines, more suitable to overseas motoring, while steel supplied to the assembly plants was rationed according to the proportion of cars produced for export.

The industry resisted wholesale change. The specialist firms argued for the need to preserve individuality in car design, while the mass manufacturers opposed change which would require considerable investment in new machinery and machine tools. It would concede the current advantaged position of the British motor industry in world markets and result in large scale displacements of labour from the industry. The rationing of steel and model change, however, had an increase in the number of redundancies in the industry and a rise in the challenge of management to workplace organisation.

In February 1948 the Birmingham AEU DO report claimed:

"Redundancy has reached serious dimensions in parts of the division. Birmingham shop stewards having met on this issue". 22

The most serious challenge took place at the Rover works. The scale of the redundancies had virtually wiped out the workplace organisation. The Rover stewards sent a letter to their MPs pointing to the effect of the Companys method for applying redundancy during a model change.

".....with the net result that all the JPC and between 80 and 95 per cent of all productive workers are now discharged, together with the convenor and the majority of shop stewards". 23

The shop stewards had tried to raise the question of the changeover through the JPC. The firm had refused to work the guaranteed week, or consult with shop stewards through the production committee over their decision to declare the redundancy.

At Austin, the changeover for a new model brought a redundancy of 600 workers, who were given a weeks notice. The notices were issued without prior consultation with either the shop stewards or their JPC. An approach for consultation by the stewards was refused by the management. L.P. Lord, Chairman of Austin, said on the 16 January:

"When staff redundancies occurred during the war the shop stewards were consulted by National agreement. This Agreement terminated in June 1946". 24

He went on to say:

".... it was the directors and not the workers who ran the factory". 25

Feelings among sections of the workforce were running high over the manner of dismissal, a number of those made redundant had given long service to Longbridge. On the 17 January, the stewards held a meeting attended by some 300 employees to report upon their failure to get the management to agree on joint representation by management and workplace representatives on the redundancy list.

The shop stewards were seeking to avoid a stoppage. The convenor,

Dick Etheridge, was reported as saying on the 19 January:

"We are not asking for strike action but through our organisation we can take this matter up on a National level and we expect support from the Government on this". 26

The shop steward committee received the approval of the meeting to take the issue up with the Midland Regional Board for Industry, while the Birmingham MP, Y.V. Yates, raised the issue of consultation in the House of Commons. The Austin stewards had previously agreed to the introduction of a nightshift to ease the effect of the fuel shortage at Longbridge. They did so on the understanding that there would be no unemployment. Now they faced a redundancy without explanation. Etheridge stated the committee's attitude towards the managements methods:

"We are not looking for trouble but we are not afraid of it. We are extending the hand of friendship in the interest of production but if the firm does not want it that way, they can have it the other". 27

The stewards approach achieved little other than publically raising the question of the role of JPCs. The Midland Regional Board reported that there were 65,000 vacancies in the West Midlands. When the redundancy was raised in the House of Commons on the 27 January, the Minister of Labour, Geo. Isaacs, merely re-stated the Government's faith in industry resolving its own difficulties.

"I would point out that there is well established constitutional machinery in the Engineering industry for the settlement of differences between employers and their workpeople". 28

Though the Government favoured consultation, and would be willing to call industry together to discuss the advantages of it, they would not become directly involved, nor place a statutory obligation upon employers to operate JPCs. The Minister, in answer to a question arising from the circumstances at Austin said:

"I think it is unfortunate that a mass discharge should take place without at least some sort of consultation with those concerned. The constitutional machinery of the industry, however, must be used before I intervene". 29

and on JPC's

"We think that committees of that sort are most valuable if they voluntarily work in that way, and they are most likely to be useless if they are compulsory". 30

The Austin and Rover redundancies illustrated the employers willingness to utilise the authority bestowed in the National Agreements. The Longbridge management had not sought to replace the special redundancy procedure, as they saw the determination of the level of the workforce exclusively a management matter, beyond the concerns even of the JPC. Lacking the direct support of the Labour Government and confronted with the limitations of procedure, redundancy was becoming an issue which could only be challenged in the workplace.

Over in Coventry, the January redundancies were seen as direct attacks upon shop floor organisation. At the Armstrong-Siddeley, union membership had been growing. In December 1947, a campaign conducted by all the unions and the plant had begun for 100 per cent membership. Armstrong-Siddeley had continued the war-time

practice of consulting with shop stewards where they had a redundancy of more than five workers, but during the past year they had began to challenge the position of convenor of shop stewards, even though it had existed in the workplace organisation since the war. The growth in workplace bargaining had been met by restrictions placed upon the movement of the convenor during working hours. This attempt to curtail the activity of the JSSC, through preventing access to their convenor, had been combined with a series of individual dismissals which lay outside the practice of prior consultation.

On the 21 January, Allcock, an operator of a radial armed operating machine, was given a weeks notice on grounds of redundancy. He was a member of the AEU and had been employed by the firm for 10 years. The day before he was to leave, it was discovered that his job would be filled by Kirman who had been previously a member of the AEU but now was known to oppose union membership. When the question was raised by the section steward of the AEU, with the superintendent of foremen, there appeared to be the possibility of alternative employment being offered. The position of the AEU convenor and shop steward was that this should go to Kirman. On the 26 January, when these facts were being reported to a general meeting of all shop stewards in the factory, a stoppage of work took place in the machine room while the stewards were away. It soon spread to the whole works as 4,000 workers went on strike. When this information reached a shop stewards meeting the stewards gave their support to the shop floor action. They sent a message to the machine room which said:

"The meeting of shop stewards at present being held supports the action of the operators who have ceased work, and will now proceed to recommend that all operators throughout the factory cease work immediately".31

The unions in the plant saw the dismissal of Allcock and the replacement of his job by Kirman, as a response by the management to their efforts before Christmas, to recruit non-unionists to their respective unions. At the works conference which followed the ending of the strike, the AEU official, Billy Stokes, argued:

"It is, therefore, understandable that the general mass of workers and shop stewards throughout the factory are firmly convinced that this is a challenge on the part of the company to let the workpeople know that they are having no truck with 100 per cent trade union membership".³²

The Company were arguing their right to declare redundancies upon the basis of the level of work. Although the unions did not challenge this view, nor that there was an actual redundancy, they did contest the action of dismissing a trade unionist whose ability was not in question, and replacing him with a non-union employee.

The state of union management relations was seen by the employers as resulting from the position of shop stewards, who were failing to see that agreements were adhered to. The COV EEA Director said, on behalf of the firm, at the Local Conference held on the 28 January:

"They must have a responsibility to their unions to see that agreements are honoured. It is their responsibility, when a stoppage of work occurs, to do their best to see that the procedure is operated; but here your stewards went out of their way to extend the stoppage and to abuse procedure".³³

The COV EEA saw the issue of deteriorating relations at Armstrong-Siddeley resulting from the increasing influence and independent action of the shop stewards organisation.

"The shop stewards decided to take action and what they consider is appropriate action is strike action against the firm, if the firm are not prepared to dismiss a non-unionist. Therefore I do not see how you (the trade union officials) can contend this deterioration in the atmosphere lies at anybody else's door but your own stewards". 34

The outcome of the dispute was that Allcock was suspended, pending the outcome of the issue going into procedure.

The use of procedure, however, for the handling of redundancy cases was increasingly being seen to be of little relevance, especially on the shop floor. The encouragement by local officials to get issues placed into procedure, either to prevent or stop industrial action by workforces was becoming exposed by the limited redress on questions of managerial rights. During the Autumn of 1947 and the beginning of 1948, the vehicle builders officials had consistently discouraged their membership from taking strike action in redundancy situations. The membership were insisting that where redundancies arose, the short time working clause should operate in preference to job-loss.

On the 11 February 1946, the Coventry branch of the NUVB in response to the initiative of their shop stewards, had passed a resolution that:

"As from 18 February 1946 we definitely ban overtime as long as we have members signing the vacant book".³⁵

The Branch secretary was asked to place an advert in the Coventry Evening Telegraph, and write to the COV EEA informing them of the decision. The Employers Association had taken the whole issue to Central Conference, claiming it breached the National Overtime

and Nightshift Agreements. The NUVB officials were left with convincing their membership to agree to particular, rather than blanket, policies towards overtime bans.

In August 1947, Daimler made 16 NUVB members redundant and refused the stewards request for short-time working. A mass meeting of the vehicle builders at the factory decided upon strike action should the management refuse to operate short-time working. The NUVB union official had been brought to the works and had:

"....with the greatest of difficulty, on a close vote got the workforce to accept putting their case into procedure". 36

The union considered it had strong grounds, in view of the short-time working agreement, for establishing the principle of short-time in the Coventry district. The reference in procedure was that the:

"Principle of short-time working to prevent disturbances in the Coventry district, in keeping with Section V Clause 13 of the National Agreement".³⁷

At the local conference, the employers drew an emphatic interpretation of the agreement and the reference. The Director of the CCV EEA stated:

"You have asked us, in your terms of reference, to say to every member firm that they should keep what labour they have got, and if they do not need it work short-time. Our answer to that is NO".³⁸

He went on to add:

"All I am saying is that a known level of production should be balanced by a labour force that will give a full working week". 39

At Central Conference, the position of Clause 13 was given more clarity from the EEF viewpoint. It was pointed out that the agreement advocating short-timing working hinged upon the phrase.

".... if practicable...." 40

There could be no general ruling upon what was practicable. As conditions and circumstances varied, not just between particular firms, but over time within the same firm, it was not possible at Central Conference to say categorically that firms should always work short-time and never discharge men. This had to be left to each individual firm to decide. The employers, in other words, were saying that they were willing to comply with the short-time clause in the agreement, but its application depended upon particular practical circumstances to be determined at local level by the individual employer. The decision was of importance to the NUvB. In February they had 50 body makers, finishers, and trimmers unemployed, with a further 100 members under notice. In addition, Morris Bodies and Armstrong-Siddeley were declaring large redundancies.

On the 24 February 1948, the vehicle builders raised the question of short time working at the bodies factory of Morris Motors. The labour force had been cut by 16 per cent. The local officials were losing their case upon the Central Conference decision. The firm refused to work short-time, claiming it impractical.

They argued, also, under the 3 April 1946 agreement, they were under no obligation to pay the guaranteed week to redundant workers whom they subsequently re-engaged. The guaranteed week agreement was effectively encouraging employers to declare workers redundant rather than hold on to labour and operate short-time working. Unlike the inter war period, employers had less incentive to share out the work. To avoid the possible payment under the guaranteed week, the motor industry federated employers were seeking to work a full week with the least number of personnel. Where the balance of work failed to sustain the level of the workforce, redundancies took place.

This was vigorously opposed by vehicle builders, whose union had long adopted work sharing to prevent the signing of the vacant book. This practice was particularly prevalent in the Railway workshops, as well as the inter war motor industry. On 12 May, the officials of the vehicle builders were again at a works conference, this time for the continuation of short time working at Jaguar. The union side were stressing the difficulties they were placed under when firms declared their members redundant. Jaguar had in the past regularly worked short time. The NUVB had seen this as the firms accepted policy. Owing to shortages, supplies output had failed to reach the anticipated 250 cars a week. As production fell to 150 a week, the company began to shed labour. The NUVB officials registered 'fail to agree'.

The redundancies which occurred in the motor industry between the Autumn of 1947 and the beginning of 1948, saw the federated employers standing firm over the managerial functions aspects of redundancy. The co-operation which existed between employers and unions and, particularly, the agreed joint working between managements and workplace organisation over issues like

terminated with the return to a market economy. The employers showed no desire to replace the Special Redundancy Procedure. JPCs were being ignored in regard to redundancy questions. The withdrawal of state protection over dismissal and the establishment of employers rights under the 3 April agreement, left the only constitutional course of action for workforces, the increasingly doubtful Avoidance of Disputes Procedure.

Over short-time working, the officials of the vehicle builders credibility was being undermined by their lack of success in getting the Coventry motor industry to adhere to the spirit of the national agreement with the employers federation. The union had had the experience of Morris Bodies and Jaguar declaring workers redundant but recruiting fresh labour within two or three weeks. Elsworth, the area official of the union, was again back at Central Conference claiming:

"Our people in Coventry are very much concerned about what they feel is the somewhat casual way in which redundancy is operated. Men are dismissed and within, perhaps, a fortnight taken on again".⁴¹

The union was faced with the Coventry employers acting as the arbiter of what was "reasonably practicable" in the interpretation of a collective agreement, without consulting with the workforce. At a local conference, held in Coventry on 11 March 1949, the NUVA branch secretary A.V. Workmen, criticised the employers control of short-time.

"The problem is that employers take the view that they are judge and jury as to when practicable. They possess information not available to the workforce yet if they explained the position to worker representatives then much of the suspicion could be removed and a better feeling created".⁴²

The growing bitterness over employers attitudes towards the operation of short time working and redundancy, broke out in a strike at Barkers, the coach building works of Daimler in Coventry. Ironically, it occurred when the managing director of the firm had called a meeting of all shop stewards in the firms' main factory. While the stewards were attending the meeting to hear of the redundancy the foremen in the body shop were issuing notices to 28 vehicle builders. The Branch Secretary told the Coventry Evening Telegraph on the day of the strike, 14 February, 1948,

"There was an immediate flare-up because the firm had in its wisdom picked out practically all the men who were active trade unionists such as shop stewards and secretaries".⁴³

The redundancy list of 28 workers included three NUVB shop stewards plus their convenor, Billy Thompson, a member of the Coventry Branch committee, who had a number of years service with Daimler and had worked in the body shop longer than at least three other vehicle builders who were being retained. The local official of the NUVB explained that the issuing of notices while the stewards were talking with the managing director, had created such bad feeling among the membership that there was a spontaneous reaction, with 180 workers out on strike. The area official, Elsworth, claimed that even by the standard of relations between management and unions in Coventry, the issue proved to be one of the most difficult he had encountered. Speaking at Central Conference he explained,

".... when the stewards got back to their benches they found the notices already there. You can imagine the feeling that would go round a workshop with conditions such as those operating, and of course the thing went up in the air and it was my job to get it back on the rails again. It was one of the most difficult jobs I have had, even in Coventry".⁴⁴

The whole of the works, which, produced the bodies for the Daimler 2.5 litre saloon and Daimler Ambulance, had stopped. In the main Daimler factory, a further 300 redundancies were issued.

On the second day of the dispute the trade union officials were able to get the vehicle builders to call off their strike in order that the whole redundancy could be discussed at a works conference the following morning, 16 February. The officials agreed to raise three questions with the firm and the COV EEA.

- "1 That short time working should operate instead of redundancy.
- 2 The procedure adopted in this instance in declaring redundancies.
- 3 The request that consultation should in future take place before workers get their notice - this relates to the reinstatement of Thompson".⁴⁵

At the conference, the employees moved little from the previous policy of employers rights under the agreements. They were only prepared to give a broad indication of the likely numbers of workers involved in a redundancy to trade union representatives. Only after the notices were served would they enter into a discussion over the merits of individuals, or give consideration to possible substitutions being made. The employers rejected the suggestion that selection had been victimisation of active trade unionists. The choice was not made upon union membership but was based upon ability. They accepted that Thompson was a skilled man but not as good as those who remained. On the point of him having longer service, the firm would consider this only where,

"..... other things being equal".⁴⁶

The union official attending the conference was left with the view of re-opening the question of the names on the list. This was referred back to the works where substitutes to take Thompson's place could be considered. On the point of short time working and the procedure for declaring redundancies, the unions in attendance declared 'failure to agree'.

The strike had clearly placed pressure upon the workings of procedure. Though the dispute largely involved the vehicle builders, it was supported by TGWU members at Capmartin Lane. It was therefore the CSEU representation, which included its secretary, Jack Jones, who were conducting the union side at the Conference. The stoppage had had total support in the body shop. The vehicle builders clearly considered their chief steward had been victimised through their inability to influence redundancy. Even before the hurriedly organised conference, the NUVB branch committee had applied to their N.C. for victimisation benefit.

A special committee meeting of the NUVB heard on the 14 February that,

"The firm agreed that if there was any substitute they would consider the same and that W. Thompson would be allowed what they (Daimler) describe as reasonable entrance to the works in order that the position could be investigated".⁴⁷

Over the position of substitution the report to the meeting said,

"The whole of the shop volunteered to go out in order that Thompson could retain his position with the firm. One man was chosen and his name submitted to the management".⁴⁸

In April, the Birmingham District organiser of the vehicle builders reported the reinstatement had been completed, following a member volunteering to act as substitute. His July report stated that the firm had agreed on a redundancy procedure in which the management would consult with shop stewards before dismissal notices were issued.

Industrial peace at Daimler did not last very long. At the beginning of November, a strike took place over an attempt by management to change the method for determining piecework prices in the body shop. Ten workers had been dismissed over the adoption of time study to fix prices. The branch committee, in offering its support for the workers at Daimler, offered to call a meeting of all the city's vehicle builders and ask for the 'blacking' of work to the company, should the workforce decide to continue with the dispute. It was eventually decided that the strikers, plus the ten discharged, should return to work and give 14 days for negotiation, through which time study would be operated. If, at the end of the period, there was still no agreement then the case would be put into procedure. As negotiations got underway, the main assembly sections were able to agree a price, with the exception of the door hangers and cleaners. Once these negotiations were completed, however, the management announced a redundancy. They informed the shop stewards of the numbers involved, but not the names. When the notices were given they contained the name of Billy Thompson, the NUVB chief steward.⁴⁹

The firm agreed to consider any substitutes put up by the stewards. They were given the names of the last six starters, but refused to accept any of them.⁵⁰ Since Thompson's reinstatement at Daimler,

he had been offered a foreman's job which he refused. The management claimed they were not questioning his ability but his timekeeping. They were not prepared to alter that decision. On the 8 November, 150 vehicle builders went on strike, only the inspectors in the union remained in the works, but even these indicated they would come out if the dispute became official.

The Coventry branch decided it was time for the national leadership to take on the question of victimisation. In July, following the previous encounter at Daimler, Coventry branch had sent a resolution to the national conference

"That Conference notes with concern the increasing number of active trade unionists subjected to victimisation and black listing and request general conference to consider urging the Government to introduce legislation. Safeguarding the fundamental right of every trade unionists to earn his living".⁵¹

On the day of the strike, the branch passed a resolution recommending a return to work and suggesting the EC call an official strike of all NUVB members at the Daimler. The resolution stated,

"That we agree to recommend to our members that they return to work and that we make application to EC for official sanction to call all members working on Daimler bodies wherever they are working, out on official dispute".⁵²

At a meeting of the membership in the works the following day, the resolution was accepted, with the reservation that everything would be undertaken to get Thompson his job back. The Coventry branch called upon the General Secretary to organise a National Conference with the EEF to get Thompson reinstated. If a satisfactory conclusion was not reached in two weeks, he would be asked to call

an official strike. The General Secretary's suggestion of taking the case through procedure was rejected at a special branch committee meeting. The Coventry vehicle builders had lost confidence in the local workings of procedure in cases of redundancy.

The resolution to the NUVB EC at ^A special meeting, held on the 14 November said,

"That the Coventry branch is of the opinion that no useful purpose could be served by taking this case through local procedure". 53

The meeting went on to agree a resolution for the reinstatement of Thompson.

"This Branch views with some urgency that matter of dismissal of our member W. Thompson and request EC Committee to take steps to get Bro Thompson re-instated or to withdraw our members from the shops doing Daimler work". 54

A deputation from the Coventry branch, composed of Richmond, Wyatt and Elsworth, addressed the EC on 26 November. They stressed that the strongest possible lead should come from the National leadership. The branch had already rejected a local conference.

"....as it only meant delay, victimisation was getting serious in Coventry and a stand had to be made to protect stewards". 55

They went on to remark of the consequence of failure,

"....if we failed our stock would certainly drop in the area". 56

The EC voted 7-5 in favour of calling the membership employed in Daimler, in Coventry, out on strike. The EC justified its action by claiming that the employers were evading their obligations over the recognition of stewards in the 1922 Procedure agreement. The EC minutes of the 26 November state,

"We consider the circumstances surrounding the dismissal constitutes a violence of our national agreement insofar that the employers action is regarded by the union as an attempt by them to interfere with the discharge of our function as a union. We therefore instruct the Coventry branch and the Birmingham DC to withdraw all members employed by Daimler and declare all their work 'black' ".57

Not surprisingly, the original cause was beginning to lose some of its momentum in the workplace. It was 39 days after Thompson had been made redundant that the NC support for an official strike was given. In the run-up to Christmas, there was a reluctance to forego wages for what was being seen by some of the membership as an increasingly lost cause. In Coventry, the Branch Committee met on the 5 December to start arrangements for the strike. Notice was given to the Humber management of a one day token strike by vehicle builders in support of Thompson. Discussions took place at Morris bodies for the timing of their protest. The Branch called a meeting of the Daimler workforce for Saturday, the 17 December, in the AEU Hall.

In the meantime, all overtime would be stopped at Daimler and the Branch Secretary was requested to avoid sending any further labour to the works.

An official strike, beginning on the 2 January 1950, would be 52 days after the original one day stoppage of the 8 November. The

meeting of the Daimler vehicle builders decided on a narrow majority to further request that the EC should approach the Employers Federation at National level. At the Branch Committee meeting on the 19 December, it was decided that the only course of action was to request a works conference. The Cov EEA were willing to call such a Conference at short notice, providing the letters notifying strike action were withdrawn. The Branch Committee voted to accept this condition and called off the strike.

This protracted dispute may have been indicative of a car firms' attempts to curtail the influence of shop stewards, during a period when the industry was seeking to re-adjust for a new model range. Not only was this a period of extensive shop floor bargaining but an occasion when the firms' management were seeking to establish new piecework times by the stop-watch. The working methods of the apprenticed coach builders were still largely an anathema to the engineering techniques of the motor industry. The shortages of craftsmen available to the industry after the war, the increasing supply of semi skilled trainees, the introduction of female labour, in addition to the decline in the proportion of apprentices, was beginning to transform the composition of the workforce in the body and trim shops. This development was being felt not just on the big assembly tracks, but also within the specialist manufacturers.

The NUVB steward in the workplace, with his loyalty to the union and allegiance to the skills of his trade, became the defender of craft pride and shop organisation. He was at the forefront in an industry whose product was the outcome of dynamic change in appearance and production technique. The feelings of the Midland

Vehicle builders towards the use of the stop-watch, had been firmly voiced at their 1948 Annual Delegate Conference. The Birmingham District Committee proposed,

"That this Conference is definitely opposed to the use of the stop-watch, as a method of fixing piecework prices, but we are agreed that a suitable timing arrangement 'mutually agreed' is acceptable". 58

and from Coventry,

"That this Conference will support EC in any action they may deem necessary to end the pernicious system, prevalent in the engineering industry, of timing workers with a stop-watch". 59

This question of 'mutuality' clauses, governing the negotiation of piecework prices, contrasted with the sole discretion being claimed by employers over questions of redundancy, in these early post war years. The shop steward became the defender of "the rate" in the workplace. As the assembly plants were prone to almost continuous technical change, compared to the mainstream of British engineering industries, and subject to sharp fluctuations in job opportunities, it was the steward in the workplace who was becoming the arbiter for the fate of the workgroup. Workplace control over redundancy became an essential support to the existence of workplace organisation.

The defense of 'mutuality' clauses governing the negotiation of piecework prices, contrasted with the sole discretion being exercised by employers over questions of redundancy in those early post war years. As workplace control over redundancy became essential, to retain the existence of workplace representation,

the employer strategy to curb the influence of workplace organisation, through the application of the power to dismiss established through national agreements, met opposition in the better organised sectors of the industry, where the defense of standards were more consciously associated by the shop floor with the character of shop representation. In the main, this was in Coventry, among the better organised skilled sections of the motor industry. The spontaneous strikes among vehicle builders at Humber, Armstrong-Siddeley, Daimler, and the Rover plant in Solihull, all involved the tightly organised body building and trim sections. Here the defence of organisation was invariably associated with defending craft status. These disputes were, therefore, entirely sectional and removed from a wider workplace support. The unofficial basis of the action on the NUVB lines, moreover, was probably not unrelated to the strategic limitations of the unions' local official, who was based in Birmingham. This not only encouraged independent activity on the part of the membership directly affected, but frequently led to support from the predominantly lay membership which comprised the Cov BC. The delay in the arrival of officials to the scene of a strike, and the absence of prior notification of redundancy notices, encouraged these well organised groups to take spontaneous action in support of their workplace organisation. In the poorer organised workplaces, like Morris and Austin, the basic weaknesses in organisation enabled works managements to either completely ignore workplace organisation and JPC's in the handling of redundancy, or forced the leaderships of these workplaces to rely upon the support and intervention of local MP's or Labour Government Ministers.

Although the national agreements gave works managements the authority over redundancy decisions, without local arrangements giving workplace representatives a say in the redundancy process, the effect of procedure merely acted to weaken the position of the local officials' attempts to resolve conflicts constitutionally. While procedure operated to give control over the handling of the grievance to the union officials, the individual union basis upon which representation was made, divorced the defence of workplace organisation from possible workplace organisational support. This small scale redundancies, both administered and opposed upon a sectional basis, enabled works management, in the motor industry, considerable latitude in being able to select prominent workplace leaders in some of the better organised sections of the industry, at a moment when the power to act was considerably weakened due to a fall in trade or a decline in work, through model changes, or reorganisations in production. The power of management was considerably enhanced by the prevalence of strongly organised but sectional interest, and from a fundamental lack of shop steward unity in effectively operating joint committees. In many parts of the federated industry, but especially in the Morris and Austin plants, low levels of union membership, especially among the semi-skilled track workers and the indirect workers, precluded the possibility of any opposition at all to the power of management on the question of redundancy. During the 1947-1948 recession, the federated management in the car industry, clearly demonstrated that, over the issue of redundancy, they had completely dispersed with the workplace gains which, under the wartime arrangements, had acted to prevent the victimisation of workplace representation.

3 EARLY POST WAR WORKPLACE ORGANISATION

In the transition period, the scale of unrest, despite the far greater absorption of the state, labour and capital into the workings of the war industries, was merely a pale shadow of the conflict which accompanied the conclusion to the first world war. Reasons why this should have been the case, can not only discount the undoubted support given by the shop stewards movement towards the war effort between 1939 and 1945, but also, during the period of post-war reconstruction, their sympathy towards a Labour Government, elected by such a large degree of popular working class support in the 1945 election.

At the end of the first world war, 89 million working days were lost through strikes between 1918 and 1920.⁶⁰ The conclusion of the second world war witnessed a marked contrast in the pattern of conflict. From 1945 until 1947, the total number of working days lost was only 6.5 million.⁶¹ Clearly, strikes, like those in the motor industry, over 'trade union matters' and the attempts to change the methods for determining piecework prices, were of importance for the future shape of workplace organisation after 1945, but there was no challenge by the engineering employers to match the events of the 1922 'lock-out'. In engineering, the existence of the 'shop stewards agreements' arising out of the first world war upheavals, provided a limited role where organisation existed within the workplace. During the inter war period, the general weakness of workers in the labour market undermined the role of the shop steward to the point of virtual extinction. In the motor industry, the absence of a continuous workplace organisation for the majority of the workforce, resulted in intermitted stoppages by largely non-unionised workforces. The war economy and full employment enabled the presence of shop stewards

to be established. The requirements of a war economy, state regulation over dismissal, and encouragement of a positive involvement in production at workplace level, provided the conditions for a 'constitutional' shop stewards movement to emerge in engineering.

In the period of reconstruction, the employers in the motor industry increasingly sort to utilise their re-established powers under the 3 April 1946 agreement, to contain and discharge the extension of the shop stewards activities. The strikes which occurred during this early post war period, invariably began to strain the commitment of shop stewards organisations to a constitutional resolution of their grievances. This dilemma was most vividly being enacted in the Midland motor industry, particularly over issues concerning piecework prices and redundancy. The ambiguity remained implicit in the general attitude of the shop stewards movement, towards their loyalty to the Labour Government on the one hand, and their defence of workplace gains on the other.

Discussing strikes, following the ending of the Humber dispute in May 1946, the Metal Worker cited the difficulty,

"The strikes which have taken place in various engineering centres have not been due to any desire on the part of the shop stewards to impede the Governments programme or to cause friction with the trade unions. On the contrary, the shop stewards who were praised during the war by Cabinet Ministers and the press for the magnificent part they played in the war production, are determined to see the programme of the Government they elected fulfilled speedily, but they are also aware that if a drive for increased production is to meet with success the employers also have certain responsibilities"⁶²

These responsibilities lay in seeing that worker aspiration for improvements in earnings and working conditions were not abused. The demand was for,

"..... a fair share of their output".⁶³

'The Economist', on the 22 March 1947, reflecting upon the position shop stewards had achieved on the shop floor, and, ascribing an importance born of their role in the war economy, described them as the NCO's of industry. While it distanced itself from an endorsement of the SSNC 1945 manifesto, 'Shop Stewards and the Future', it did acknowledge the possibility of harnessing the war time collaboration in industrial relations for the post-war period. In somewhat conceited tones, it pointed to the potential the stewards could offer during the economic crisis of 1947-48.

"Jejune and misconceived the shop stewards manifesto certainly is and yet it would quite clearly be wrong to dismiss it as valueless in the present crisis. It is a reminder of the great fund of goodwill and eagerness to help which still remains to be drawn upon in the lower ranks of industry. Its real and substantial point is that better use needs to be made of the NCO's of industry and there is enough meat in it, for all its faults, to show that they have something of value to offer. It is also a warning of the need if this fund is to be drawn upon, for much more effective and detailed educational campaign that has yet been attempted. Ignorance is as big an obstacle to efficiency as any other".⁶⁴

In other words, it saw the importance of the influence which shop stewards could play in industry, if only their views could be changed. Or, as "The Economist" put it,

"If the shop stewards manifesto proves anything, it is that the patient cannot be trusted to write his own prescription".⁶⁵

For the employers in the West Midlands motor industry, especially in Coventry, the period 1946-1950 saw the strengthening of workplace organisation at the point of production, proceeding alongside a challenge to the extending influence of the shop steward. At Jaguar, in Coventry, the District organiser of the NUVB could report in July 1949.

"The organisation in this shop continues to improve, thanks to the good work put in by our shop stewards in all departments". 66

At the Humber, the Coventry Branch Committee heard on the 24 October 1949,

".....that NUVB have 100 per cent membership in bodymakers, finishers and trimmers. Very big improvements in the position since Bro. Bush took over as convenor. The week spot is welders where membership is mainly AEU and TGWU". 67

And at Armstrong-Siddeley, where the factory was moving towards 100 per cent union membership during the last quarter of 1948, the vehicle builders, reported at their committee meeting of 31 October 1949,

"Agreed that apart from the lack of a steward in the trim shop the organisation was quite good. Agreed effort should be made to get trim shop steward" 68

In Daimler, although the body shop was fully organised, the AEU were contesting the COV CSEU failure to challenge the Daimler management policy of all workers, irrespective of whether they belong to a trade union or not, had the right to nominate a trade union member for the JPC.

The case in procedure over Thompson, the convenor, had reached 'fail to agree' at Central Conference on 20 January 1950.

Daimler requested 30 body makers in the first month of the year, but when the Branch Secretary forwarded Thompson's name, his application was refused. The NC agreed to protest to the EEF. On the 23 January, the Coventry Branch Committee were informed,

"It seemed very likely we should have more trouble but Bro. Thompson after considering the position made a statement that he had no further desire to seek employment at the firm. This our members accepted with extreme regret". 69

The challenge to workplace representatives through redundancy situations was not confined to federated employers. Standard Motors possessed both high union membership and an effective JSSC. It was the workplace organisation which had achieved the 42½ hour week in 1946. The chairman of the JSSC, Bill Warman, could comment to the Metal Workers in August 1946,

"We are proud of the success achieved by Standard workers in winning the shorter working week. This sets the seal on the many improvements in working conditions as a result of trade union organisation, now practically 100 per cent. Unity among the unions inside the factory has largely accounted for the advances made. Inter-union rivalry has not been allowed to hamper the stewards organisation". 70

Standard, of all the car firms in Coventry, had positively sort to encourage the continuance of war time co-operation into the post war period. Following its decision to leave the Employers Federation, the Company's deputy chairman, Sir John Black, took charge of production and labour relations. The firm went for high productivity, based upon a combination of capital investment with an integration of worker effort through high incentive

and co-operation with the workplace organisation. Between 1945 and 1947, £3 million was invested into re-equipping the plant for the production of the Ferguson tractor and the Vanguard car. All pre war plant was written off. In 1947, £50,000 was taken out of profits and put into a special fund for employees.⁷¹

The firm concentrated upon a limited model range and enlisted the involvement of the shop steward organisation, in what the company report for 1947 called,

"A radical review of production methods and great capital expenditure".⁷²

Any overtime would operate by consultation with the shop stewards; prior consultation was agreed for cases of redundancy. The firm placed considerable responsibility for achieving its goal of rapid growth upon the influence of the shop steward organisation. The stewards were involved in planning output targets. The EC of the JSSC held regular meetings with the management to discuss future production programmes and even suggest the lay-out of the factory so that output targets would be more likely to be met. In December 1949, the wages structure was completely modified. The straight piecework system was replaced by a premium bonus system, based upon a higher base rate than the federated agreements. Eight base rates replaced the eighty different rates which existed previously. Both direct and indirect workers were under bonus schemes. This rationalisation of incentives with a limited number of bonuses, accompanied the division of the workforce into large gangs, grouped similar to that developed in the Coventry aircraft industry. The result was the creation of large multi-skilled gangs, in which the authority of the senior shop stewards

were enhanced, both by management, and the organisation of work.

The workplace organisation became under a direct obligation to pursue increased output and productivity. Bill Warman wrote of the 42½ hour week agreement in January 1947,

"When the agreement was signed, the shop stewards were conscious of the responsibility they had accepted in saying that no loss of production would be felt as a result of the shorter week".⁷³

In the report back by the stewards to the Standard workers, of the outcome of their negotiations, Warman writes that two features of the agreement were given priority,

"(a) The important lesson to be learned in the value of Trade Union organisation, and the need for a drive for 100 per cent membership in the whole of the factory".

"(b) The importance of the workers backing, to the full, the stewards pledge that production would not suffer because of the reduction in hours".⁷⁴

Not only did the firm eventually become completely organised in 1947, but the management were able to claim an increase in production of 30 per cent. The shop stewards were involved in the dual role of enhancing the interests of their membership, while having to bear the responsibility for the honouring of agreements entered into with the management. This example of the extension of war-time collaboration was based upon the managerial co-operation of workplace organisation. The results of this were spelt out by Warman,

"One of the reasons for this remarkable increase in production has been the way in which workers, through their trade unions, have been consulted in the planning of target figures". 75

Labour relations at Standard were not just characterised through a formalisation of war time collaboration, they involved an organisational integration within the workplace organisation, and an acceptance of the modern methods implicit in the technology of the car industry. On the 17 October 1949, a procedure agreement was signed between the company and the COV CSEU. Under this agreement, the company not only undertook recognition of shop stewards but provided facilities in the works for holding trade union ballots. The division of the Company's plants into areas for shop steward representation were mutually agreed between management and unions. Provision was made for the acceptance on the part of the company, of the recognition of a senior shop steward for each union with membership in the firm. Written into the agreement was the recognition of the JSSC for each factory, in addition to a Joint Works Committee to cover the three Coventry factories. The agreement stated,

"Each Trade Union having shop stewards in the Company's factories may appoint a senior shop steward for that factory, who will be responsible for the co-ordination of all shop stewards of his union employed in that particular factory and he will be granted by the company reasonable time and facilities to undertake his responsibilities". 76

and

"Each factory shall have a shop stewards works committee composed of the senior shop steward of each affiliated union. The shop stewards works council should elect a sub-committee of not more than four of their number, including the chairman and the secretary for the purposes of negotiating with the company". 77

Not only was there to be JSSC for each factory, but also recognition of a Joint Works Committee to cover all three factories.

"There shall be a Joint Works Committee composed of representatives of the company and representatives from each factory shop stewards Works Committee".⁷⁸

Shop stewards were allowed a weekly meeting, to be held on the firms' premises and in working time. Stewards were provided with access to other departments, with foreman permission, additional meetings could be held on application to the Production Director, Sir John Black. The first level of the procedure agreement lay with the worker raising the issue with his section shop steward; unlike the EEF procedure where the foreman was the first point of contact. Depending upon the issue, representatives of the section shop stewards, senior shop stewards, or members of the works committee or joint works committee, would be involved in the first stage of procedure and could be present along with local union officials at the works conference stage. In 1951, the firms output of cars had risen by 58 per cent compared to 1947, while its workforce had only increased by 46 per cent in the same period.

In April 1949, however, a collapse of standard's overseas tractor markets, saw the possibility of the whole of the Banner Lane factory, 3,600 employees, being made redundant. The redundancy arose at the same time as negotiations were still taking place over the procedure agreement. Because of a sterling crisis, exporters were finding it difficult to sell cars in dollar markets. Standard experienced a dramatic fall in sales to their main markets, France and Argentina. Tractor production fell from 1,500 per week to under 500; France and Argentina alone had accounted for the sale of

2,000 tractors per month. In February, to meet this decline in production, the management introduced short time working plus a redundancy of 350 workers from the tractor assembly at Banner Lane, as an alternative to reducing the labour force by 1,100. By March, the tractor plant was on a three day week. In April, the firm announced a further 1,700 redundancies, which still fell short from dismissing the plant's whole workforce. The response of the shop stewards was to call upon the Government to break with part of the trade agreements operating under the Marshall Aid programme, which forbid trade with Eastern Europe. Pointing to the possibilities of long term markets in the state socialist countries, the Standard shop stewards issued a statement on the 10 September 1949 which said,

"We find it impossible to understand how it is that with a policy of full employment the Government is prepared to see one of the most efficient plants in the Country, engaged on producing a vital commodity, sink to a position where it is producing a fraction of its potential output".⁷⁹

At the AEU DC, meanwhile, criticism was beginning to mount over the handling of the redundancies. The DC heard, that on the 12 April, that 293 workers originally made redundant had been re-engaged while the company were still declaring further redundancies. The works manager at Banner Lane, had refused to allow the factory shop stewards hold ^{to} meetings and had been preventing some stewards from carrying out their functions. Although this took place before there had been full agreement on the procedure agreement, it did little to deter the AEU DC, on the 12 April, passing a resolution supporting their shop stewards actions, resisting what was described as,

".....Anti-trade union activities on the part of a section of management". 80

Among those declared redundant was Ernie Roberts, AEU shop steward at Banner Lane. On the 27 September, the General Purposes Committee reported the failure to ^{reinstatement} Roberts, who had been a member of the Communist Party at the beginning of the war, and who had become a known figure to local employers. He subsequently was offered a job at the Rover works at Solihull, in Birmingham, to begin on the 19 December. Before, however, he was due to start, he received a letter from the management which stated,

"Due to re-arrangements made by Head Office they could not now engage him, as promised, on Monday, 19 December". 81

The Company offered the payment of an 'extra gratia payment', amounting to the guaranteed week wage, as compensation. On investigation by the AEU District Secretary, the Labour Management at Rover reiterated that,

"....they have no suitable vacancy to offer at the present time". 82

Over in Birmingham, the state of workplace organisation was generally in a poorer condition in the car factories, compared to the position in Coventry. Union membership was lower. Three months after the dismissal of the convenor and shop stewards at Rover in Solihull, the Divisional Organisers report to the Local Conference, in June 1948, failing to find a 'settlement'.

At the Rover plant, at Acocks Green, the Birmingham AEU DC heard

reports on the 14 September of the,

"Anti trade union attitude of the management" ⁸³

The Morris Commercial plant, in Birmingham, possessed only 13 shop stewards. A report to the DC stated,

"That organisation generally was in a bad state although some progress had been made, considerable loss of membership had occurred due to arrears which had arisen from the refusal of members to attend branch meetings". ⁸⁴

It was agreed that the District Secretary would attend a special meeting of the AEU Shop stewards. The convenor of Nuffield Metal Products, meanwhile, told the AEU DC that,

"Trade union organisation consisted mainly of toolroom workers, but considerable progress had been made in the recruitment of apprentices.... difficulties exist in recruiting shop stewards.... most workers on night work falling behind into arrears resulting in expulsion".⁸⁵

The Nuffield convenor agreed to arrange for a factory gate meeting and asked for suitable leaflets to be published for circulation in the works, to encourage recruitment.

At Birmingham's largest car plant, the Austin works in Longbridge, the development of workplace organisation during this early post war period, encountered both a growth in the employed labour force and an increase in the number of trade unions in the plant. The growth in shopfloor representation remained permanently constrained by the management of the firm. Although the JSSC came to play an increasing role in certain areas of shop floor organisation,

it often lacked the complete support of all the unions in the plant. On a question like the defense of mutuality in the determination of piecework prices, it had, in 1948, been able to attract widespread support from all the stewards plus the shop floor workers. There were, however, a large number of skilled unions with memberships in the works, some of whom lacked a prior experience of the motor industry and who reserved their right to act independently in furtherance of their own interests. The growth among the mass industrial unions occasionally brought about allegations of 'poaching'. The Longbridge works had a significantly larger workforce than other federated car firms and also a numerically greater proportion of employees who were classified as skilled. The very diversity in the composition of the labour force, plus the attitude of management impeded the early development of workplace organisation in the Austin.

Table 4.8, showing the number of manual employees working for some of the main car firms in August 1946, reveals that Austin engaged a larger proportion of skilled workers than the specialist car firms like Armstrong-Siddeley, and Daimler, or the mass producers like Humber, and Standard. Moreover, although 65 per cent of the Longbridge operators remained unskilled, the 5,000 skilled employees was almost equivalent to the total workforce employed by a medium size car firm like Standard. Austin also had a greater number of skilled unions. At Standard, for example, seven of the ten trade unions had representation among the 900 craft or skilled workers, while three unions, TGWU, AEU, and the NUUB recruited workers upon a mass scale. At Longbridge, however, there were 16 unions in 1946, of whom 13 were exclusively skilled unions, while the three major unions TGWU, AEU, and NUVB sought memberships among the majority of manual workers. Working methods

TABLE 4.8 - THE EMPLOYMENT OF SKILLED WORKERS IN THE BRITISH MOTOR INDUSTRY 1946.

FIRM	TOTAL MANUAL EMPLOYEES	TOTAL SKILLED EMPLOYEES	PERCENTAGE SKILLED
Armstrong-Siddeley	2,700	628	(23)
Daimler	3,000	793	(27)
Humber	4,000	607	(16)
Standard	4,774	716	(19)
Austin	14,126	5,000	(35)

Source: Coventry Toolroom (Minutes) Dick Etheridge Collection
P.R.O. LAB/46.

at the 100 acre site had, by 1946, been reduced to over 100,000 separate operations. From its origins at Longbridge, in 1912, Austin had relied to a lesser extent than the majority of car firms on outside suppliers. Having its own body shops, engine assembly, and machine shops on the central site, the Longbridge works employed a workforce possessing a far wider range of specialist skills and abilities than found, for example, at Morris Cowley in Oxford, where much of the pre-assembly work was brought to the works from the outlying factories of the Morris empire. This relatively high number of skilled workers and the considerable extent to which the division of labour at the works had been broken down into the skilled, but limited job skills, led to a fragmented trade union organisation, in which the particular interests based upon a union organisation was less willing to submit to a common organisational unity based around the JSSC.

During the early post war years, growth in trade union membership increased the diversity of unions. There existed the skilled unions, with a long history of organisation at Longbridge, like the UPA, whose patternmaking shops were 100 per cent organised. The union had had members working at Austin in 1906.⁸⁶ The Boilermakers, on the other hand, with only a small membership at Austin, and without strong ties to the industry, began, in 1949, to elect a shop steward at Longbridge.⁸⁷ The ETU had a small membership concentrated mainly in the maintenance section, but it also had a number of members spread across the works. These included electricians, telephone engineers, plus car wirers, in the production shop, as well as outside contractors who worked in the plant but were not on the Austin payroll.⁸⁸ There was both the Birmingham sheet metal workers and National Sheet Metal Workers Union, with memberships in different parts of the works, but agreeing to hold a joint meeting to elect a leading steward, and a deputy.⁸⁹ There were also Foundry workers, Metal mechanics, members of the Heating and Domestic Engineers Union, a Draughtsmen union, and a clerical union. In addition, there existed skills drawn from the building trades, - woodworkers, bricklayers, and plumbers, - whose organisations were not affiliated to the CSEU; consequently they had no redress in procedure, beyond the works conference level.

Between 1945 and 1950, the manual labour force increased from 12,536 to 17,758.⁹⁰ In this period, both modernisation of the plant and the growth in the workforce changed the relative importance of particular unions in the production process. Among the skilled unions, there was a decline in those trades working in wood, as metal and plastic materials became more important in car production.

The real benefactors in this period of growth, were the three mass industrial unions, whose presence in the works increased immeasurably. The AEU remained the largest Longbridge union, organising the skilled workers from the toolrooms; toolfitters, maintenance engineers, and machine shops. Its membership comprised a whole matrix of skilled and semi skilled trades among the press-tool setters, jig makers, gauge-makers, stampers, forge-men, hardiners and grinders. The fastest growing post war union, however, was the TGWU, which, by 1950, had three union branches covering its membership at Longbridge among the semi skilled and unskilled workers, in assembly, transport, stores, packing, and machine shops. The third main union, NUVB, continued to organise the body, trim, paint, and final assembly lines.

Despite this undoubted growth in union members, the development of workplace organisation was hindered in an important respect, by the attempts of management to prevent an extension of shop steward activity in the works. In 1942, the Austin management had agreed to recognise the convenor, but insisted upon calling him a 'chief shop steward'.⁹¹ They refused to recognise either a chief steward or senior shop steward for any of the unions with workplace representation at the works. Where, as was the case during the war period, a number of sections were without a shop steward, the issue would have to be handled by the convenor. The limitations of this arrangement soon became apparent. The convenor increasingly became absorbed on a mass of isolated complaints from sections without shop steward representation.

In 1944 George Harriman, the Managing Director of Austin, accepted that unrepresented sections could go to the nearest shop steward. This arrangement had certain advantages for shop floor workers, as it gave them an element of discretion over which steward would represent their views. They could, in effect, choose the most experienced, or most capable or most militant, and could choose a steward irrespective of their or his union membership.⁹²

From the front line management point of view, it meant foremen were often having to negotiate with stewards from a different section of the works, on questions affecting the workings of their own department and the workforce. for which they held ultimate responsibility. Dealing with unknown outsiders often meant the application of different values, methods and working practices. It also led to negotiations being conducted with a shop steward from another section, who was also under the jurisdiction of another foreman. In other words, the management's attempts to restrict the development of workplace organisation, by only recognising the convenor, and refusing to accept the role of either a senior steward or member of the JSSC, led to a considerable fragmentation in bargaining, negotiation and representation at shop floor level between individual stewards and foremen.⁹³

The outcome of the higher managements' attitude towards workplace representatives, did have consequences for the level of workplace organisation. It firstly discouraged a unity between shop stewards, particularly those from different unions. It confined the union activity of senior shop stewards to out of works time. Their possibilities for attending meetings with their members or other shop stewards, was restricted to lunch-breaks or after work hours. The limitations of time necessarily encouraged a more sectional and less unified organisation, as priority tended to be given to their own members and shop stewards of their union. Consequently, the representatives of the JSSC in 1945 comprised of memberships entirely drawn from the largest union, the AEU.⁹⁴

The managements attitude towards workplace organisation, not only discouraged its development, in terms of a representative JSSC covering all the unions, but it also deterred workers from seeking the position of shop steward in the weaker sections of the firm. While the better organised sections of the works, like those covered by the AEU, might be able to create sufficient financial support to cover the loss of earnings of an individual steward during negotiations, the weaker parts of the works certainly did not. Even the position of convenor required not just the additional hours spent on trade union activity, but also an acknowledged loss of income, despite the support coming from the membership. The position of convenor was subject to strict regulation by management; both his movements in the works and access to the convenor, either by a trade union member or shop steward, was subject to the permission of superintendent of foremen. The results in a works like Longbridge were inevitable. Long hours, excessive overtime during the war period, shift-work plus

the distances which Austin workers travelled on their daily travel-to-work journeys, offered few opportunities for union activity. Night shift workers, in particular, had to make special appearances during the day to gain access to their convenor. Despite these limitations in, 1946, a shop stewards organisation was in existence with its own headed notepaper titled:

"Austin Motor Company's Shop Steward Organisation"

Chairman	O. Cresswell
Works Convenor	R.A. Etheridge
Deputy Works Convenor	G. Vernom
Secretary	A.H. Bennett

The methods of election was established during this period. At an annual meeting of all shop stewards, the election of the convenor would take place on a show of hands. This would be followed by the election of a chairman, secretary and then a committee covering the whole factory. The election to any of the posts or a position on the committee, took place upon an open vote. There were no reserved positions, or arrangements for places or votes upon trade union lines. In practice, it was the AEU, because of its organisation, and number of stewards, which held most of the early official positions. In 1946, there were about 30 shop stewards attending the annual meeting.⁹⁵

During the early post war period, the managements opposition towards workplace organisation continued, despite the growth in the number of unions and in union membership. These developments placed considerable stress upon the JSSC's struggle for acceptance among large sections of the workforce, on the one hand, and its attempts to gain a unity among union representatives on the other.

The convenor, Dick Etheridge, wrote in the Birmingham Journal in November 1946:

"These new conditions demanded a different approach to trade union organisation, and the success at Austin in building the organisation indicates that these new methods bring results. Probably the most important factor in building efficient shop steward organisation in a factory of this type, is to obtain satisfactory co-operation, between the various unions. This is obtained at Austin Motors by a joint shop stewards meeting held monthly and a works committee elected annually. No problem which is likely to affect the interests of the whole of the workers is taken to a final issue before consulting the works committee and thereby the rest of the unions".⁹⁶

This basis for organised unity was, in a period of trade union growth, often a fractious one, particularly where expanding departments of the works were being contested by different unions for the right to organise, or where changes taking place in working methods and skills, or materials, being used in the production of cars, were subject to change. In such issues, the sectionalism and the established right of an individual union to act independently, weakened the legitimacy of the JSSC, which possessed no real sanctions which could be applied against union independence.

Before 1950, the increase in membership into the mass trade unions, AEU, TGWU, and NUVB, was largely a fluctuating one. Numbers of workers failed to sustain their union membership; some changed unions because they were transferred to another section of the works where a different union held the membership. Some became disenchanted with their existing union, or left after falling behind with contributions. It is, however, clear from the AEU shop stewards' minutes at Austin, that a constant source of

tension between the leading unions in the works, lay in disputes over membership. The resulting inter union conflict weakened the unity of workplace organisation. The effect of the formation of the Birmingham CSEU, led the AEU stewards at Longbridge to consider the importance of unity among their own organisation. On the 16 February 1948, a meeting of the stewards proposed,

"It is necessary to organise the engineers in the AEU so that in the event of our long term aim of amalgamation the AEU policy would have a foremost claim in any new set up".⁹⁷

The meeting went on to agree to give Etheridge and Cresswell the AEU support at the next JSSC elections. It also decided to hold a monthly meeting of AEU shop stewards to encourage unity among its organisation .

On the 9 April, there were appeals being made for the AEU to give its support to the JSSC which was established under the Confederation Constitution. Dick Etheridge, having been elected works convenor, faced the criticism from his own stewards over the election of only two AEU stewards on the JSSC. The minute book records,

"Etheridge appealed for unity in the activities of the AEU otherwise there would develop a trade union squabble which would not be healthy in a works of this size"⁹⁸

By the 24 September, there was a call for,

"..... the loyalty to be shown by the AEU shop stewards to the AEU first and other organisations after".⁹⁹

The AEU, the largest union of Austin became more vigilant over its membership towards the end of 1948. On the 1 December, the AEU shop stewards committee heard reports of the poaching of its members by the TGWU. Complaints were made against the sheet metal workers,

"All sorts of methods being used to encourage AEU members to join the SMW".¹⁰⁰

The Engineers agreed that,

"AEU inform shop management that AEU shop stewards do not accept that members can be moved from any section or department until the question of demarcation has been taken through trade union machinery. We pledge support for any action members may take should it continue".¹⁰¹

This exercise of organisational independence on the part of individual unions, undermined the credibility of the JSSC. Individual unions ran campaigns to attract membership from particular sections of the works, without regard for the general unity of workplace organisation. In the West Works, the sheet metal workers had established their membership in the body section, but the NUVB claimed the right to membership for all the boot, lid, and door hanging operations. Those jobs were closed to exclusive control by the vehicle builders. The AEU dominated recruitment of skilled workers in the machine shops and tool rooms, but beyond those areas, accusations of poaching were a feature of this period of union growth, where the diversity of abilities and unions combined with a manufacturing process open to constant change. It was left to the JSSC to regulate this position by, first of all, operating a policy of "open door" access to all the works departments. In an attempt to reduce inter union friction,

it adopted the principle that,

"Once you are in a union at Austin you stay in".¹⁰²

Besides inter-union conflicts, management opposition to workplace organisation continually weakened shop floor unity and representation. Lacking the facilities from management to hold shop steward elections, the actual numbers of shop stewards remained unknown to the convenor and JSSC, while the integrity of the sectional steward was often open to question by workgroups.

The Austin shop stewards' report, . refers to the effect of management attitudes upon workplace representation,

"In the early days the management took a very 'slap happy' attitude to the recognition of shop stewards apart from their general discouragement for the election of any. This resulted at various periods with shop stewards being nominated without any section meeting, with shop stewards being appointed from branches of certain unions, and other methods, which while not being out of rule of the particular union led to dissension in the sections of mixed unions where they were to operate".¹⁰³

The existence of a large number of craft unions and the establishment of three mass unions, in a context of managerial opposition to workplace representation, raised continually questions over the rights of the shop steward, especially on sections with membership of more than one union. The members of different unions would challenge the right of a steward to represent them. Stewards from one union might refuse to represent workers from another organisation. Tensions between union organisations led to challenges over the attendance of externally elected stewards to JSSC meetings. In the absence of regular workplace

elections based upon the membership of the workgroup, the haphazard development of steward representation generated areas of confusion and uncertainty which undermined shop floor unity and became a source of conflict within workgroups and between unions in the works.

The period of post war growth in the workforce, attracted manpower from other employers, with different experiences of shop floor organisation. The election of shop stewards from among this new labour encouraged further fragmentation as they began to apply their previous shop floor practices to the conditions at Austin. The Austin shop stewards' reports comments on the influence of new labour upon shop floor representation,

"If such conditions at the previous factory included, closed shop, separate union negotiation, different waiting time payments or fall-back payments, it does not need the brains of Disraeli to see the problems, that are going to be created".¹⁰⁴

The development of workplace organisation at Longbridge during this early post war period was inevitably slow and not without internal conflicts.

The progress towards workplace unity among the Austin trade unions remained precarious despite the establishment of the Birmingham

CSEU, and the appointment of Confederation stewards at Longbridge.

On the 22 November 1949, the Austin management reported that output, during the year ending in July, had reached 127,000 cars. This, despite the shortages in raw materials and the mass redundancy which took place in January 1948, was 48 per cent above the previous years output. As employment at Longbridge had begun to increase, workplace representation expanded rapidly. In September 1948, the AEU were reported as having 75 shop stewards.¹⁰⁵ By May 1949, this had risen to 95.¹⁰⁶ At the beginning of 1950, the wider representation of union interests on the JSSC was encouraging the development towards unity on the shop floor. In January, difficulties which were reported by members of the AEU, from shops with mixed union membership, led the engineering stewards to advocate a far more conciliatory approach to inter-union conflict. The AEU stewards agreed at their union meeting on 26 January that,

"..... though we should be prepared to protect our members the most sensible solution is to achieve an understanding with other unions on questions of demarcation".¹⁰⁷

The gradual movement towards a more representative workplace organisation at Austin, led to an exacerbation of relations with the management. After 1950, the JSSC entered into a period of struggle for the recognition of their organisation. Internal dissent and managerial hostility continued to be the opposing forces which the JSSC had to overcome. Following the announcement, on the 15 October 1948, that Lord Nuffield and L.P. Lord had, after a series of talks, agreed to an arrangement whereby a constant interchange of information on production methods, costs, design and research patents, would take place between Austin and

the Morris organisation, it was reported in the Birmingham Journal, March 1949 by George Varnon, Deputy Convenor of Austin's that,

"Already the AEU shop stewards have a joint committee for information between the Austin and Nuffield shop stewards and this must be developed so that threats to full employment and wages in the industry can be effectively met".¹⁰⁸

This, the first contact between the shop stewards of the two largest federated car manufacturers, was the start of the transformation of workplace organisation in the motor industry. Although the organisational ties between the two firms' shop stewards committees did not take place until the 2 February 1952, after the formation of BMC, in the Nuffield organisation there already existed the embryo of the future combine shop stewards committee.

Lord Nuffield had appointed Mr. R.F. Hanks, the former managing director of Nuffield exports, as the organisations new vice-chairman, in November 1947. The appointment was to partly redirect the company towards export markets, and to introduce younger men with new ideas to the organisation. Lord Nuffield, along with several other of the firms' existing directors, were passed retiring age. The first task undertaken was a series of changes in the management of most of the Nuffield factories. The organisation came under more centralised control, as three directors were given the responsibility to streamline the re-organised grouping of the company into three areas of administration; the Midlands, Oxford, and the Sheet Metal factories. It was the outcomes of organisational integration that gave rise to the setting up of the Nuffield Combine Shop Stewards Committee.

Workplace representation, at Morris Motors in Oxford, had been improving as the firms production began to increase through 1948. On the 15 November 1949, the Financial Times reported that Morris was exporting 1,500 vehicles a week. During much of that year the new management had presented a three page document to the JPC Committee. This outlined a firm code of conduct for the handling of behaviour at work. "Loitering" and "Smoking" were to be "prohibited". For a first offence there was to be a suspension, dismissal would follow a second offence.¹⁰⁹ Following reports by the works police, 6 workers employed on the fixing of headlamps were suspended.¹¹⁰ A go slow began in the shop, and the management decided upon reinstatement.¹¹¹

The new management, however, were engaged in far wider change in the workings of the Nuffield organisation. During 1949, work from the central controlling company in the group, Morris Motors, was being transferred out of Oxford to the recently opened Nuffield plant at Llanelli, where wage rates were lower and workplace organisation had barely been formed. The assembly of the Morris van was under consideration for transfer, from Oxford, to Morris Commercial in Birmingham. The effects of the various changes taking place in the Nuffield organisation, brought frequent inquiries from different factories in the group over the level of prices for transferred work. The idea of the Combine appears to have originated from a meeting, held in Coventry, by the local Communist Party to discuss workplace organisation in the Nuffield factories in Coventry, Birmingham, and Oxford, during the summer of 1949. The actual setting up of a Combine Committee emerged after Percy George, AEU convenor at Morris Commercial, wrote to the Morris Motors shop stewards suggesting a meeting of the Steward

committees on the question of moving the Morris Van for production in the Midlands. This meeting was arranged for September. The Morris Motors' stewards elected a delegation, comprising three AEU stewards; Alf Franklin, deputy convenor, Arthur Exell, and the youthful Les Gurl, who had just left the Navy and recently elected steward at the Cowley works. This Birmingham meeting decided upon the formation of the Combine Committee. A Secretary was elected, George Woods, convenor of Metal Products, who was to circulate all factories in the group, inviting them to send delegates to a Combine meeting the following month.

Before the next meeting took place, a redundancy of 29 workers occurred at Metal Products. Included in those dismissed was Geo. Woods.¹¹² On the 27 November 1949, an emergency meeting of the newly formed Combine was held at the District Office of the AEU in Oxford, to discuss the Combine Secretary's dismissal. Twenty delegates, representing the major plants in the Combine, attended the meeting. Woods, who was also the AEU convenor, had been given his notice at 12.30 and not allowed to remain on the premises until the end of the shift. The AEU members had come out on strike at Metal Products. No Works Conference had been called for over Woods dismissal. The Combine Committee, though they had the assurances that at least one department represented would favour strike, action decided to ask Woods AEU Branch to raise the redundancy at National level with the AEU. The Committee took the view that they were in no position to challenge the Nuffield organisation over the Secretary's redundancy. The meeting elected Les Gurl as Secretary and requested that he write a letter to all the Secretaries of JSSC in the Nuffield organisation, informing them of the Combine Committee and inviting them to send delegates

to future meetings. The meeting agreed that,

".....in future all major action taken in any of the Nuffield factories be reported at once to all other members of the Committee".¹¹³

The Committee also decided to get some,

"Concrete understanding so that in future no man could be finished and made redundant under the same conditions as Woods, ie, finished at 12.30 even though the normal working day finished at 5.30 pm"¹¹⁴

On questions of organisation, the Committee agreed that both Secretary and Chairman should come from the same factory.

Alf Frankin, Deputy Convenor at Morris Motors and Branch Secretary of the AEU, was elected Chairman of the Combine. This dramatic first meeting of the Nuffield Combine proposed that the newly elected Secretary should write to H.F. Hanks, the Nuffield Vice-Chairman, informing him of the setting up of the Combine, and request recognition.

It was agreed that, in cases of dispute, all other JSSC's would offer financial aid. A leaflet was drawn up setting out the functions and organisational principles of the Combine for circulation throughout the Nuffield factories. The Combine Committee continued to meet every two months and was mainly concerned with watching the movement of work, and the variation in prices being paid in the different areas of the Nuffield organisation. Within a year, all the Nuffield factories had delegates attending the Nuffield Combine with the exception of

S.U. Carburettors, in Birmingham. S.U. had informed the Combine that,

".....S.U. Carburettors Committee believe that without official recognition by Mr. Hanks, JSSC was a waste of time". 115

The Nuffield Combine covered a labour force of just over 20,000 drawn from M.G., Morris Motors, Morris Radiators, in Oxford, the Engine and Body plants in Coventry and Morris Commercial, Tractor and Transmissions, and Metal Products in Birmingham, plus a Metal Products works in London. The Committee itself had 24 members, two delegates from each factory plus a secretary and chairman, covering 12 factories and the Nuffield organisation.

Although the Nuffield Combine had emerged as a response to the increasing centralisation in the Nuffield organisation, the Combine itself was unable to get recognition from the management. Hanks had replied to the Secretary's letter saying he could not consider recognition until all the plants trade unions had given the Committee recognition. The Combine meeting to discuss this response decided that members should approach their own organisation. Les Gurl recalls the letter he wrote to Jack Tanner, President of the AEU, in an interview on 11 April 1979.

"I wrote to Jack Tanner explaining the situation, that we were not looking for jobs as officials, - saying we were ex-servicemen worried about our jobs - jobs might be lost. Steel shortages at the time - but large demand for cars. Explained need for Committee to safeguard our jobs - might be on short time or lose jobs. Sole purpose of setting up this Committee to safeguard our jobs, safeguard workers rights and to make sure we get workers into the unions". 116

Tanner's reply was that, as President, he had no right to recognise any Committee that had other unions, as this would lead to animosity with other union organisations; there was no way a Committee composed of representatives of other unions would receive AEU funds. This became the classic response not only for the Nuffield Combine but also for the BMC Combine, until the formation of the 'British Leyland Corporation Combined Trade Union Committee' on 1 May 1968, when 30 full-time union officials attended the merging of the BMC and Leyland Shop Stewards Committee.

On 1 December 1951, the Nuffield Combine members met to discuss whether their Committee should continue to meet on a regular basis, or only when an issue of importance arose. They were addressed by Joe Green, a member of the Smith's Combine Shop Stewards Committee, which had been formed in 1940. The meeting heard the advantages of maintaining a Combine on a continuous basis, even if it lacked official support. In October 1950, the Secretary of Smiths Combine, Len Nickolay, had set out the two basic principles which determined the authority of their Combine Committee. In an article he wrote for the Metal Worker he stated,

"It has to be emphasised that the role of the Combine Acting Committee is purely advisory and it is left entirely to the shop stewards committees of the individual factories as to whether or not they accept these recommendations". 117

He went on to write,

"Combine organisations such as this must not be regarded as an alternative to the existing trade union machinery, but as an addition to it". 118

The experience of the Smith Combine shaped the direction of the Nuffield Combine Committee until its merger with the Austin Shop Stewards Committee on the 2 February 1952.

Until the formation of the BMC Combine Committee, the Nuffield Combine continued to meet upon a regular two-monthly basis, alternating between Oxford, Coventry and Birmingham. The Committee were able to record some success over the question of prices and the movement of work.

In the first four year period following the second world war, unionisation in the motor industry generally appeared strongest in the car factories in the Coventry area. Among the specialist firms in particular, the slower pace of work and the high premiums placed upon quality and finish, attracted a large proportion of skilled workers to the upholstering, trim, body building and metal work sections of car construction. Although the principles of mass production were applied, the payment of the skilled rate and the retention of the close knit values and traditions of a craft heritage, saw the establishment of closed sections of employment to society members, in works like Armstrong-Siddeley, Daimler, Jaguar, Rover, and to a lesser extent, Alvis. The creation of workplace power, based upon the control over the supply of labour on certain sections of car assembly, where the full rate was being paid, inevitably reinforced an exclusive interest and a sectional consciousness among those groups of unionised workers reaping the benefits of their organisation. This condition not only induced considerable inter union rivalry, not only from the inequities inherent in piecework bargaining, but also as changes in materials, car design and technology made less clear the demarcation lines

between established union or work group spheres of influence. Sectional unionism within workplaces with levels of unorganised semi skilled and unskilled workforces, strengthened the independence of individual union organisations in the workplace, but helped to separate union from non-union workers, and discourage support for joint committees. It was in the medium size to large assembly plants, where the tempo of work remained much quicker, and where the proportion of workers with a skilled work history, a craft background, or a life time experience of the industry, was likely to be a smaller proportion of the workforce, and where a higher specialised division of labour was much greater, that an organisational unity between workplace unions became far more imperative, in order to combat the ability of works managements to exploit the vulnerabilities of workplace leaderships at the maximum point of weakness - recessions in trade and lay offs arising from changes in production and the introduction of new car models. Though the general effectiveness of workplace representation differed in accordance with the density of union membership, the proportion of the workforce on the skilled rate, and the willingness of managements to seek to regain increases in rates conceded during favourable trading conditions, the general defense of workplace representation remained largely sectionally based and invariably in the hands of individual union officials, after works managements in the federated companies had failed to effectively mount a general offensive against wage determination. Despite the influence of left dominated shop stewards in Austin, Morris, Rover, and Jaguer, it was only at the non-federated Standard that the ideal model of 100 per cent organisation, structured through a hierarchy of senior stewards, factory convenors, so fostered by the left-wing, war time shop

stewards' movement, had actually become established. While clearly, the different labour relations' strategies between federated and non-federated employers certainly had an influence, encouraging either a general tendency towards organised unity within the workplace organisation or acted to promote the potentiality for division and sectionalism already implicit in the operation of the piecework system, the actual influence being exerted by the Communist Party within the workplace organisation, appeared to be one of seeking to create an administrative workplace unity among the leading workplace representatives, while attempting to contain any potentiality for overt conflict which might appear to endanger the elected Labour Government. This was perhaps most evident at Standard, where the workplace leadership cultivated a collaborative relationship with the works' management, which involved considerable worker responsibility for the level of productivity provided a distribution of surplus was partly made available to the workforce. But even at Austin, where the works management refused to recognise a workplace organisation, or seniority in representation, other than the position held by Dick Etheridge the convenor and party member, Etheridge was able to direct the considerable discontent over the mass redundancy, while the management insisted upon completely ignoring the workplace representatives, into procedure and get the issue raised through local Labour MP's in the House of Commons. It was in the Nuffield organisation, that a war time development of inter-plant committees emerged. While this was novel to the motor industry, its creation out of the roots of labour insecurity in a centrally administered multi plant organisation was itself the outcome of Communist Party initiatives. It was in fact modelled on the Smiths Combine Committee, though earlier combines did exist in the inter war aircraft industry.

Smiths had been formed in 1940, by Communist shop stewards with the specific objective of offering advice, the exchange of information, and policy recommendations on the clear understanding that it would not seek to supercede the functions of trade union officials or union organisations. It was, however, the very failure of union officialdom to effectively challenge the authority of management over the issue of redundancy, which was to be both a spur to the rapid spread of Combine Committees in the motor industry during the 1950's, but which was to pose their left wing leaderships with a most profound dilemma - what was to be their attitude towards union officialdom and independent workplace activity in the defence of the right to work and the right to determine the representatives of the workplace?

PART 7

THE STRUGGLE FOR THE
CONTROL OF REDUNDANCY

Abstract

Before 1956, EEF policy towards the issue of redundancy strongly opposed any approach on behalf of the CSEU which appeared to imply an infringement of the discretionary powers of individual employers, in matters associated with redundancy decisions. The leadership of the constituent unions within the confederation, remained severely divided over policy towards redundancy. In particular, they appeared unable to overcome the persistent threats which the redundancy issue posed, not just for the basic insecurity of wage labour, but to the position of shop stewards in the workplace. In the motor industry where, after 1950, rearmament and shortages of vital materials for vehicle assembly resulted in a number of large scale lay-offs, charges of employer victimisation of workplace representatives through redundancy selection brought about a series of shop floor challenges to managements insistence upon unilateral control. This part examines the dynamic process by which redundancy became a central issue, not just between the institutionalised relationship of the EEF and the CSEU, but how it became a crucial issue in the formation of combine committees in the motor industry.

The section begins by providing an analysis of the failure of employers and unions to reach an agreed accommodation over the managerial control of redundancy. The second section examines a series of lengthy strikes during 1951 in which the defence of workplace organisation appeared as the central question in redundancy conflict. The final part accounts for how these isolated struggles at workplace level became generalised as redundancy itself became a formative issue in the creation of combine committees across the motor industry. It is maintained that in the struggle

for the control of redundancy, it was a left wing leadership organised through combine committees, rather than the organisation of trade union officials at national level, which provided the basis for a unified policy towards redundancy, to challenge managerial control. While this leadership, however, operated outside the established decision making process, the implementation of its policies, at individual workplace level, remained subject to repeated attacks by not just employers and local union officials, but also dissident groups of rank and file workers. A unity of workplace policy over redundancy, at shop steward level, had to continually confront the power of both institutional and shop floor opposition.

1 REDUNDANCY POLICY AND THE DEFENCE OF MANAGERIAL PREROGATIVE

The prominence of redundancy as an issue of power conflict in post war British industrial relations emerged with the rise of unemployment during the economic crises of 1947-48 and 1951-52. It eventually reached a crisis in 1956. Though there was a general increase in job insecurity of wage labour across engineering, layoffs, short time working and redundancies were most keenly felt by employees in the motor industry, especially in the mass assembly plants. The involvement of the motor industry in munitions manufacture during the war period and the consequent role of workplace representatives in production matters, including the administration of redundancies during 1944 and 1945, had led to attempts throughout the car plants for shop steward organisations to retain some level of control over the power of management in redundancy decisions. For the Federated companies, however, EEF policy and interpretation of the Termination of Employment Agreement, of the 3 April 1946, obliged the employer to give a week's notice, or provide payment in lieu. In regard to the issue of redundancy, this agreement restored the power of managerial prerogative in terms of the actual redundancy decision and its implementation. Importantly, it enabled management to exercise power over the selection of who was to go. This national agreement, governing the power to discharge labour, became a cornerstone of a managerial strategy to curb the growing power of workplace organisation, during the first ten post war years. In the motor industry the operation of this termination agreement in redundancy situations became a critical issue of power conflict in workplace relations.

In the motor industry where periodic recession and the layoff of

wage labour were combined with a growth in workplace organisation, insecurity affecting both employment and workplace organisation gave rise to acute sources of discontent. Employer allegiance to prerogative, embodied in the national agreements on the one hand, and the emergence of considerable inter union disagreement at national level on the other, led increasingly to an inability of the national leadership to act in a concerted way to abate the growing power of workplace organisations demanding an influence in the control of redundancy. The differences at national level among the union leaderships over redundancy policies, despite the organisational unity established through the formation of the confederation in 1947, prevented a unified institutional challenge to managerial power on the basis of Federation policies. It was workplace organisation which directly experienced the outcomes of managerial decision making which remained far less inhibited about challenging managerial power despite it being underpinned by the authority of the EEF.

Following the cancellation of the special Redundancy Procedure and the signing of the Termination Agreement of the 3 April 1946, the engineering employers remained firm over their right to exercise their power of discharge in redundancy situations. Above all, Federation Policy remained most insistent that management's should not relinquish control over decisions taken in the workplace. In April 1949, for example, the chairman in central conference rejected, without further consideration, the redundancy of ten employees from an engineering works where both the AEU and the NSMM contested that neither the need for a redundancy had been proven, or that the redundancy selection itself had taken place upon a reasonable basis.

"We cannot accept the position", stated the Conference chairman, "that in these days when redundancy occurs there has to be agreement on the shop floor as to who goes or does not go because, quite frankly we would get nowhere; we would be just wasting our time. It is the function of management, and that, quite definitely is our attitude. We would, of course, encourage the management to act with discretion but, in acting with discretion, we are not for the moment suggesting that they should in any way waive their rights. Once it became a question of committees and consultation, or running backwards and forwards on issues like this, the management of the works would be completely impossible, because the views of one man would not agree with those of another".¹

The policy of the EEF opposed any arrangement which appeared to compromise the authority of management in redundancy decisions. Federation policy, did however, allow for individual employer discretion over how the actual redundancy decision was to be intimated. This was not to appear as a compromise over the redundancy decision. On the 12 May 1950, central conference considered a protest from the TGWU over a redundancy and the Coventry district which involved four shop stewards, including the branch chairman and secretary. On the question of whether a redundancy list should be submitted to workplace representatives the chairman stated EEF policy.

"It is not obligatory for any firm to submit lists : it is not in any agreement, and it is not the usual practice. It is a question of courtesy. In the vast majority of works, it is not done at all : but here we have a firm that is extending extra special courtesy to shop stewards, and in this case your union. I am prepared to say that the firm is prepared to continue that, but it is only a courtesy gesture".²

Although this Coventry firm was still paying lip service to the war time regulation of providing lists of redundant workers, they had abandoned the consultative aspect of the arrangement. The firm refused to engage in discussions over the method of selection of redundant workers and would not consider substitutes from among

workers with less service than those declared redundant.³

The EEF, as well as opposing any compromise in managerial authority with trade union or workplace representatives for redundancy decisions, were also opposed to accepting a responsibility for those affected by their decisions. The Federation in conjunction with the BEC organised a powerful lobby to oppose two attempts to introduce a private Parliamentary Bill to provide employer compensation for loss of employment. The first Bill introduced in 1949 by W Guy, a Labour MP,⁴ and the second, more restricted Bill presented by a Conservative MP⁵ and supported by Edward Heath, both provided for compensation to be awarded to any worker with 5 years service in cases of dismissal, (other than grounds of misconduct), reduction in salary, wages or emoluments; or, where a worsening of employees position in regard to the conditions of his service as a whole, took place. Though neither Bill reached second reading, the Federation's observations of member firms and associations revealed complete opposition to its introduction, while the BEC Standing Committee on unemployment, on which the Federation was represented, were reported as being unanimous in their opposition to the very principle of the Bill.⁶ Not only did they inform the Chief Industrial Commissioner at the MOL but they dispatched a deputation, in 1949, to the Government prior to the date of second reading. Both Bills failed to gain Government support.⁷

Within the Federation the membership's objection was that it placed upon the employer a liability for the state of the labour market. From the districts of the motor industry, the employers complaint was that falls in piecework prices, depressions in trade, and low employee performance, would become the responsibility of the employer

and not the employee.⁸ In other areas of the Federation, it was claimed the Bill would inhibit the power of management to dismiss workers in recessions or reduce wages.⁹ Increased security experienced by workforces would not only interfere with the workings of the labour market but would,

".....weaken discipline still further and add to the already serious undermining of the powers of management".¹⁰

The view of the Federation was that,

"(we) consider this Bill by far the finest piece of legislation for ruining business yet devised. It is completely unsuitable to engineering with trade cycles and changes in labour demands".¹¹

The policy of the EEF remained one of opposing state interference with the labour market, where it felt the responsibility for unemployment was being transferred from the shoulders of Government to that of the employer. The Federation defended the position of freedom to act, unrestrained in both market and work situations, by either public policy or trade union activity.

Among the trade unions, in the engineering industry before 1955, it was largely the absence of unity in policy rather than the absence of policies, which characterised the CSEU approach to the question of redundancy. It was, however, events in the workplace, where the outcomes of managerial decision making were experienced, that a growing challenge to the policy of the EEF remained far less inhibited by managerial power and authority. Victimisation of active trade unionists, particularly shop stewards, and later, a growing fear of automation, both became central questions in the issue of redundancy during the first half of the 1950's.

In 1946, the TGWU, metal and engineering trade group from the Midland region, pointed to the weakening effect employer redundancy practices were having upon the unions organisation.¹² The region was calling for a continuation of the selection procedure which had operated under the wartime redundancy arrangements. At the TGWU Biennial Conferences in 1947 and 1949, the question of redundancy was the subject of considerable debate. In 1947 a resolution was debated proposing the setting up of a co-ordination panel, whereby both sides of industry could meet to prevent,

"....the large number of active members being discharged under the guise of redundancy".¹³

This, however, was defeated by Conference. At the 1949 Conference, the TGWU unanimously supported a redundancy policy embracing both prior consultation and compensation, in cases of redundancy. The resolution stated,

"That this Biennial Delegate Conference of the TGWU calls for fullest consultation with the trade union representatives throughout industry, including nationalised industries before discharges take place on redundancy grounds".¹⁴

The union also supported,

"The payment of adequate compensation to displaced workers who particularly by reason of age, cannot be absorbed".¹⁵

The position of the TGWU was to basically support the idea of prior consultation, which had operated during the war period, and redundancy compensation, which in 1930 Bevin, as General Secretary had negotiated with the Flour Milling Employers.¹⁶ In 1951 the TGWU failed, following pressure from the leadership, to endorse a motion at its Biennial Delegate Conference which had called for the GEC,

".....to seek legislation to compel all employers to give 21 days notice to the Ministry of Labour when redundancy occurs in their factories, and that no new labour be allowed to be employed until the redundant workers have been reinstated".¹⁷

Conference report stated,

"To proceed by way of legislative action to deal with the problem of redundancy involved dangerous implications calculated to destroy the value of Trade Union representation.... The view was taken that the interests of the membership would be best served by continuing to deal with the problem through the medium of the normal machinery whereby the union was able to represent the position of the member, or members, considered to have been dealt with unjustly".¹⁸

Of all the unions in the Confederation, the attitude of the Vehicle Builders towards redundancy was perhaps more directly an outcome of the experiences of the motor industry. Not only did the NUVB possess a greater proportion of its membership in the assembly plants, than the larger, general unions, but it had been subject to a series of disputes with Federated employers on redundancy questions. In 1948, at its Annual Delegate Conference, the union endorsed a Coventry resolution that the EC,

"....vigorously resist every attempt by employers to victimise and blacklist shop stewards and active trade unionists".¹⁹

In February 1949, the Coventry branch and the EC tried to get the CSEU Group Council to approach the employers association with a view to establishing joint machinery "to deal with this growing evil",²⁰ of employer victimisation. At that year's conference of the union, the Birmingham DC also called for an approach to the EEF for a redundancy agreement, in which they wanted to specify that,

"....when a redundancy occurs shop stewards must be consulted on an agreed basis which includes skill and length of service".²¹

In July 1949, the Coventry Branch was urging the EC to consider Government legislation to prevent victimisation and to safeguard,

"....the fundamental right of every trade unionist to earn a living".²²

Among the leaderships of the engineering trade unions, the main issue they faced over the redundancy question, during 1948 and 1949, had been the victimisation of workplace representatives. At the CSEU annual meeting held at the beginning of May 1948, the first redundancy resolution sought an agreement with the EEF on a procedure to enable prior consultation. The resolution moved by the Association of Scientific Workers stated,

"This conference instructs group EC to approach the Engineering and Allied Employers National Federation for the purpose of securing an agreement that in the event of redundancy in any establishment, management shall submit redundancy lists to the trade unions in order that joint consultation and agreement is reached on a procedure for discharge before any notices of such discharge are issued".²³

At the following years Conference, the CSEU EC reported that they, having to face a further resolution from the Vehicle Builders calling for the establishment of joint machinery through an agreement with the Federation as the only remedy to prevent victimisation through redundancy, would undertake to insert the principle of prior consultation in their negotiations over the constitution of the post war JPC's. Although the Vehicle Builders decided to withdraw their resolution, to enable the redundancy question to be dealt with under the production committees, the debate disclosed a number of divisions within the CSEU. In the districts of the motor industry, support was firmly behind an agreement based upon shop stewards rather than JPC's. Jack Jones, of the TGWU in Coventry, argued for the continuation of the wartime consultation with stewards, which still

operated in some of the large Coventry car plants, despite the absence of an agreement. He wanted consultation with stewards on redundancy lists and not coupled with JPC's.

"Consultation should take place with stewards who represented departments and sections who were in a position to ensure that redundancy lists were issued they were dealt with in complete fairness".²⁴

Jones also called for the working of a full weeks notice to enable stewards to take up redundancy cases with managements. J L Longworth, from Luton, argued for an agreement with stewards rather than JPC to help eliminate the delays in the operation of procedure in cases of victimisation,²⁵ while from Birmingham, J T Bolas, claimed not only that employers used redundancy to remove stewards but that the composition of production committees were sometimes made up with non-unionists.²⁶

Opposition to the argument, that a redundancy agreement should be based upon stewards, arose from the claim that it would be seen to give preferential treatment to the position of the steward. It would encourage unions to give preferential treatment to their own members, became engaged in discussions with management to differentiate membership between, married and single, women and men, those with children, as opposed to those without. For W Hutchinson of the AEU argued,

"Once one tried to differentiate and give preferential treatment to one's own members it would be disastrous to the organisation.... it meant a steward would have to argue with employers that one trade unionist should go against that of another".²⁷

For W Heppell from the Tyne DC,

"If a union held a hope of permanent employment to make a man a steward it would destroy the shop steward organisation".²⁸

The CSEU had been unable to make progress with the EEF over the question of consultation through JPC's. In 1953, however, following a period of mass redundancies, the AEU NC formulated its own redundancy policy to combat the growth in unemployment in engineering.²⁹ At the Annual Meeting of the CSEU, in August it presented its policy for Confederation policy:

- "1 Prior consultation to take place before redundancy declared.
- 2 Where redundancy occurs all overtime should cease on the part of that class of labour in the workshop concerned, or where the CSEU DC considers it necessary in the district.
- 3 Government Training Centres for the training of engineering workers to be tolerated only by agreement with the CSEU DC.
- 4 The adoption and pursuit of the CSEU plan for engineering".³⁰

The AEU, claimed William Carron, introducing his unions motion was

".....opposed to the idea of accepting the inevitability of redundancy and then having to place our people in a position of deciding and agreeing to who should become unemployed".³¹

The engineering union did not regard consultation at workplace or district level as an adequate basis to prevent the increases in both redundancy and unemployment. They maintained that such consultation should only arise after the major issue had been settled at National level. The union should also be prepared to initiate overtime bans to prevent redundancy,^{to} stop excessive overtime while unemployment and short time working.³² AEU policy towards redundancy emerged as part of a wider opposition to the insecurity of wage labour. It was not just a question of seeking a prior agreement over consultation with the employers on a procedure to implement redundancy without victimisation. The development of AEU policy

with its suspicion of training centres was influenced, in part, by the unions craft origins and membership influences. 'Restriction of numbers' and the prevention of 'systematic' overtime to "destroy the redundancy in the labour market",³³ had been the foundation of the unions trade policy since its formation in 1852. Its view that sanctions should be imposed by the district committee, arose out of the AEU's long attachment to localism in the implementation of trade policy.³⁴ The AEU redundancy policy had emerged in opposition to any consideration of compensation.

The TGWU were looking for a national agreement over redundancy and therefore proposed an amendment of all four measures of the AEU resolution. The TGWU wanted the CSEU to seek an agreement with the employers on the following objectives.

- "1 Joint consultation at District level between employers and unions concerned prior to a declaration of redundancy and with a view to minimising the effects of such a redundancy.
- 2 Basic principles to be applied, in the event of a redundancy being inevitable, to determine the number of members of staff to be discharged, with special regard to the general principle of 'last in first out', but without prejudice to the rights of key workers, hardship cases, registered disabled persons and those having legal rights to continued employment.
- 3 Basic principles to be applied when re-engagement of dismissed workers is possible.
- 4 The institution of measures for the transfer to, or training for, alternative occupations in the establishment concerned".³⁵

The TGWU, which had already been party to redundancy agreements with individual employers, did not see opposition to redundancy per se as the centre of a redundancy policy, rather they wished to possess an agreement with employers whereby, through an accepted procedure, they would be able to enter into negotiations to both reduce the

actual level of redundancy and where redundancy took place, instigate a criteria of seniority to protect the older workers from the uncertainties of the labour market. It also wanted seniority to be applied for re-engagement.³⁶ Apart from a greater commitment to retraining and redeployment within the works in cases of redundancy, which had more in common with industrial or general unionism than a craft tradition, the TGWU opposed the dominant influence in Confederation policy being decided by CSEU district committees. It argued that overtime may still need to be maintained, to prevent bottlenecks in production flows, even when a redundancy takes place.³⁷ These decisions were considered to be matters for individual unions to decide and could not be left to CSEU DC's, over which the engineering union generally held the majority influence. The TGWU, with its engineering base in the new industries of the West Midlands, was applying a more adaptive policy towards redundancy in industries where short term layoff and short time working had long been practiced. It therefore was seeking to control re-engagement as much as job loss. Unlike the AEU, it wanted to approach this through a procedural agreement to operate at local level, rather than union opposition to be exercised by national officials. Both the resolution and the amendment were referred to the CSEU EC.³⁸ In 1954, following a recommendation of the General Purposes Committee, the EC was advised to approach the EEF to establish the principle that joint consultation should take place at individual works immediately redundancy was anticipated.³⁹

On the 10 August 1954, in the absence of a specific agreement over the issue of redundancy the CSEU, largely prompted by the Federation, established with the EEF that the principle of consultation be written into the Procedure Agreement of 1922.⁴⁰ The new clause,

an addition to the General Principles, stated,

"(C) The employers and the trade unions, without departing in anyway from the principles embodied in clause (A) emphasise the value of consultation, not only in the successful operation of the procedure set out in Section II but in the initial avoidance of disputes".⁴¹

This clause to, "emphasise the value of consultation" did so upon the already established principles of Clause (A) of Procedure, "managements right to manage", and the trade union right, "to exercise their functions", with the "intention not to create any specially favoured class of workpeople". This consultation clause possessed no specific assurances in regard to its application to the issue of redundancy.⁴² It contained no obligation on the level at which consultation would take place, and as a statement of general principle it provided no guarantees surrounding the treatment of shop stewards in redundancy situations. The consultation clause in Procedure, neither infringed the employers right to prerogative over redundancy, nor did it satisfactorily resolve union differences over redundancy within the CSEU.⁴³ On the 8 February 1955, the General Secretary of the CSEU, Gavin Martin wrote to the Federation with a view to specifying consultation towards redundancy in line with CSEU Conference recommendation. The letter called for establishing,

".....the principle that joint consultation between management and workers' representatives at individual forms should take place immediately redundancy is anticipated".⁴⁴

The Federation, following a discussion at Management Board, replied,

".....although the Federation is prepared to encourage intimation of known redundancy to the workers or their representatives, with appropriate explanation to avoid misunderstandings, it is not feasible for management to accept the establishment of any procedure under which they might be deemed to share their responsibility for grappling with the problem in the best interests of those who might be affected and the maintenance of employment for the greatest number".⁴⁵

On the 9 January 1956, following a further Board meeting held on 29 December, the Federation circulated their associations outlining a method whereby joint consultation in relation to redundancy could be applied at domestic level, without having recourse to the creation of a special redundancy procedure, through a National agreement.⁴⁶

The method had five clauses.

- "(a) When a company is confronted with such a problem, the management should take the earliest opportunity of informing the work people's representatives, giving appropriate explanation to avoid misunderstanding, and telling them how the measures to deal with the situation will be put into effect.
- (b) The men who are to be discharged should be given individual notice of termination of employment. A list of names should not be posted in the works.
- (c) If a worker who receives notice considers that there are special reasons why he should be retained, he should consult his foreman. If no agreement is reached he may refer the matter to his shop steward. The shop steward may take the matter up with the management, in accordance with the company's usual practice.
- (d) If, after due consideration, the management consider that the workers application is justified, they should not hesitate to amend their decision and withdraw the notice. The final decision must remain with the management.
- (e) The decision of the Management, whether it is to maintain or withdraw the notice, should first be made known to the worker. Thereafter the shop steward should be informed if he has been concerned in the discussions".⁴⁷

The EEF position over redundancy was one of being prepared to encourage 'intimation' but not to get engaged in a procedure for handling redundancy. Intimation could take place, for example, through JPC's where they existed, or directly with the worker, or sometimes the workers representative concerned. Management at all times would retain its power over the redundancy decision, even to

the point of amending its own decision. The method provided no means by which trade union officials, either at National or district committee could become involved.⁴⁸ Workplace representatives could only become involved after the decision was made and in accordance with the workings of procedure. Trade union officials, were therefore, to be placed in a position of being involved only in cases which went beyond works conference level, on particular questions which went into Procedure, which would normally be discussed after the discharge of labour had taken place. The basic principle upon which Federation redundancy policy was developed was the individual contract of employment. In its circulation of its associations it was emphasised that,

"The engagement of a worker by an employer is the subject of a contract which is a personal matter between the worker and the employer. When, for any reason, a workers' contract of employment is terminated by either party, the termination of the contract is again a personal matter between the worker and his employer. In the interests of employers and employees it is highly important that this principle should be preserved".⁴⁹

For the Federation it was the management of the firm which was the only competent authority to assess its labour requirements. Such decisions could not be shared either with workforces, workplace representatives, trade union officials, or even employers associations. Consultation, in other words, would be in accordance with managerial prerogative.

The Confederation, despite its own differences, between unions, on policy towards redundancy, was even with the Federation's initiative of introducing the principle of consultation into the Procedure Agreement, unable to establish the minimum agreed basis for its redundancy policy : prior consultation. Beyond the discretion of

employer intimation, no role existed for union or workplace representatives in the decision making part of the redundancy process : Federation policy, over redundancy, which restated managerial prerogative, and denied a place for the institutions of wage labour, became an important base upon which a managerial strategy to check the growing power of workplace organisation developed. Actions in the workplace became the focus of the challenge to managerial power.

At the beginning of the 1950's the British motor manufacturers became the centre of a production crisis. Shortages of raw materials, a fresh impetus given to arms production and the introduction of fiscal measures by a newly elected conservative government, appeared to threaten the early post war prosperity of the industry and its labour force. Furthermore, restrictions upon the industry at a time of re-emerging international competition not only appeared to challenge the industry's supremacy in world export markets, but placed job security and the control of redundancy as a central issue of workplace relations. Employer control over the question of redundancy, combined with a common strategy to curb the growth in workplace organisation, produced a series of major confrontations between management and organised wage labour in the industry. The fear of the re-establishment of unemployment as a government policy to reinforce labour discipline in the workplace and the expansion of the arms economy at the expense of the motor industry, served to broaden the basis for opposition to redundancy in the car industry. It was the formation of combine committees at a moment of widespread job insecurity, in the absence of a unified union policy, which saw the development of attempts to co-ordinate workplace opposition, not just on an industry front, but also upon a political basis. This challenge arose from the outcome of isolated conflicts organised to protect workplace organisation during a recession. From these events, the question of redundancy, had by 1952, become a focus of attempts to provide an inter plant challenge to managerial control.

The expansion in armaments, as the western economies increased

military expenditure after 1950, placed a considerable drain upon essential supplies required for the manufacture of cars. The demands for copper, nickel, chrome, sulphur and zinc for arms production, reduced the supplies available to the motor industry. In 1951, the allocation of imported sheet steel for the motor industry was cut by a fifth. Contracts with American steel producers were cancelled, as stockpiles were reserved for the arms industry. Furthermore, for the first time during the post war period, the British Motor industry, which in 1950 had exported 70 per cent of its production, faced a serious decline in sales among some of its main overseas markets. Car producers, in 1950, began to face the conflicting national requirements for defence, exports and home demand. By 1953, almost 20 per cent of the engineering labour force was engaged upon arms production.⁵⁰ The expansion of this sector of employment contrasted with the decline in the motor industry. The production of cars fell for two successive years after 1950. By 1953, car exports had fallen by 100,000.⁵¹ Output for the domestic market was 70,000 lower than it had been for 1950.⁵² This under utilisation of capacity increased production costs. Employers shed labour and introduced short time working. Registered unemployment for the industry had remained under 1,500 at the beginning of 1950, but in the spring of 1953 it stood at 10,500.⁵³

The recession in the industry had its affect upon workplace organisation. In the West Midlands the post war growth in union membership was checked. The AEU membership in Birmingham fell by 7,500 in two years to 31,700 in 1953.⁵⁴ The TGWU lost 13,000 members during 1952 in the West Midlands,⁵⁵ while the NUVB, whose National membership had increased by a quarter between 1948 and

and 1952,⁵⁶ largely because of the growth of employment in the car industry, stagnated for the next three years. Less than 100 new members joined the AEU in Oxford between 1950 and 1953.⁵⁷ Coventry remained the only centre of the motor industry which showed an increase in union recruitment and this was mainly due to the AEU. Although there was a number of large redundancies in the Coventry motor industry during this period, local employers like Alfred Herberts, Coventry Precision, and Alvis, all benefitted from arms contracts. Membership of the AEU rose from 20,000 in 1949 to 29,000 in 1953.⁵⁸ Although the expansion of jobs in the arms sector may have retained a growth of unionisation among the city's engineers, it did not diminish the significance of redundancy and short time working for those in motor manufacturing.

Although some of the West Midland car producers did receive contracts for military vehicles, these tended to only accelerate military claims on the diminishing supplies of raw materials. Because of their four-wheel drive systems and their greater need for toughness, military transport required more of the scarce metals, particularly the light alloy steels, than did the manufacture of the private car.⁵⁹ As a result, in 1950, car production progressively fell from a post war peak of 51,020 in March,⁶⁰ to its lowest monthly output since the 1947 fuel crisis, of 30,747 in August. The industry in 1950 had an estimated "tooled-up" capacity of about 600,000 cars.⁶¹ It was not until 1954, that it manufactured to this level. Over capacity had consequences for jobs. In Coventry, during April 1950, the vehicle builders, a union with perhaps the highest dependence upon car production, after receiving a report that improvements in the body sections supplied to Standard Motors was likely to result in a further redundancy of Branch members,

the Committee declared:

"It must be fought out on the shop floor and we must give them every support".⁶²

On being informed of the possibility of a sudden redundancy at Daimler during May the BC stated,

"This has come as a big surprise after the assurances that the firm had given us, recommend, that stewards fight either redundancy or short time working".⁶³

At Morris Bodies, the employer had refused to inform the NUVB stewards of the names on their redundancy list. When it was issued, it contained the name of one of the vehicle builders shop stewards who had had 17 years service with the firm. Citing the procedure for prior consultation practiced at Standard, the NUVB officials came directly up against federation policy to sustain managerial control when they took the case to Works Conference. The Cov EEA, secretary reiterated EEF policy.

"Neither the association or the employer accepted that prior consultation and discussion should take place. Responsibility for deciding on those to be made redundant must rest with the Company and they could not be expected to share it with the shop stewards. It would place a burden on them that they should not be called upon to bear".⁶⁴

The local officials were unable to get any assurances over consultation in the future, other than the stewards would be informed once the redundancy selection and notices had been served. The NUVB fell back upon its tradition^{al} craft defences, amid the growing threat of redundancy. On the 26 June, they established a membership policy between the Coventry and Birmingham branches to control entry into the society and spelt out a craft criteria for job rights in redundancy situations. A four point policy was to apply at local level.

- "1 Applicants who have not served their time or have not worked a long period at the trade must be classed green labour, to be considered as dilutees.
- 2 Entrance to the trade should be by apprenticeship through the union.
- 3 Dilutees and replacements should be controlled and sanctioned by Branch Committee.
- 4 Dilutees and replacements should be first to go in any redundancy cases".⁶⁵

The policy was to be executed through the Midland branches and by the shop stewards in the workplace. Despite the mass production methods employed in the industry, the NUVB were using craft status not just as a means for controlling and organising the workforce in the trim shops and assembly sections and to retain the skilled rate, but they were also using it to provide a seniority in jobs. By the end of 1950 the NUVB were advising their Daimler stewards that mobile labour transferred or redeployed into the body building or trim sections had to be transferred back to their original sections in the event of a redundancy.⁶⁶ The union did not wish to see redundancy being used as a possible cause for weakening their control over the sections which they sought to completely organise, but of their inability to directly control the process of redundancy and in the face of the unified position held by the federation and their member firms, the NUVB were attempting to defend their position through sectional actions based upon their craft past. However, during 1950, in the vehicle industry, it was strikes outside the West Midlands which were to prove the major challenge to federation redundancy policy. At Crossley Motors, in Stockport, and Duple Motor Bodies, at Hendon in North London, lengthy confrontations developed following management attempts to remove representatives from workplace organisation

during the recession in trade. The recession, the fall in earnings and the existence of widespread short time working, appeared to prompt managements to use the opportunity to weaken shop steward leadership through their control over redundancy selection. On the 8 February 1950, what was described as a "lightning strike",⁶⁷ of 2,000 workers took place, after the employers had issued redundancy notices to 63 workers one of whom was John Blackburn, the works convenor. At a mass meeting the following day, the deputy convenor presented the shop stewards view of the issue at stake,

"This is a question of principle - of whether a convenor has any particular right whereby employers are expected to keep him in employment until the last man goes".⁶⁸

Of the 2,000 workforce, 1,300 decided to go out on indefinite strike in order to gain Blackburn's reinstatement. Only the sheet metal workers and the maintenance staff remained at work. The central issue was the integrity of workplace organisation, the right that elected workplace representatives should, in a redundancy, be retained in order to maintain the organisation. The Crossley management held to the EEF position that the control over the selection in a redundancy was a question entirely for management and that there was no principle of preference for shop stewards which could be accepted. The strike committee which formed immediately set about gaining support for their case from their national union organisations, local shop stewards organisations in the Manchester district and from within the heavy vehicle firms which formed part of the Associated Vehicles Group, to which Crossley Motors was a part. These included AEC at Southhall, Maudsely at Worcestershire, and Park Royal Motors in West London. Blackburn, on the 14 February, refused an offer of employment from a local firm and would not

register unemployed.⁶⁹ Along with shop stewards he refused to accept the validity of the management's decision. Though the issue was strongly supported at workplace level, a major split arose among the National officials of the principal unions involved, as well as a sharp difference between the leadership of the AEU, Blackburn's union and the workplace organisation.

The NUVB, the woodworkers union, and the Furnishing Operatives Union, all gave full recognition to the dispute. The Country's largest engineering union, the AEU, instructed the local officials to get a return to work. On the 1 March, Hugh Scanlon, DO, addressing a meeting of just over 1,000 of those on strike stated,

"The decision of the EC instructing you to return to work pending negotiations is in the post and will reach me today. It is my job to tell you to go back to work and I hope you will carry it out".⁷⁰

This call was reported to have resulted in shouts of "No", and "Not likely".⁷¹ Harry Holland, the strike committee chairman then addressed the meeting.

"Are we going to sell our principle for a £1 a week which is all we would get on strike pay?"⁷²

The meeting voted unanimously to continue the dispute, and voted a "No confidence" motion in the AEU EC. The strike committee then set about organising wider shop floor support for their cause. Failure to win the support of the leadership of the largest union in the CSEU increased the efforts to get the support of other workplace organisations in the areas engineering industry. On the 2 March the Crossley stewards organised a demonstration outside Metropolitan Vickers, at Trafford Park. This was the largest engineering employer in the North West. The following day the

Crossley Strike committee called for a half day general strike across the area's engineering industry in support for the defence of their convenor. This was arranged for Monday, 6 March. It was planned that there would be a mass meeting of the City's engineering workforce to hear the case, followed by a mass demonstration in Deansgate. In preparation for the strike, Crossley stewards visited over 30 local firms, addressing factory gate meetings.⁷³ The motor firms apprentices were dispatched on cycles to leaflet further factories in the locality. For the first time convenors from the main companies in the Associated Vehicles Group met and formed a committee to co-ordinate support within the group.

By the end of the third week, strike benefit was being paid to the members whose unions gave recognition. AEU members were being supported by donations collected from plants "all over Manchester". The strike committee sought to extend the redundancy dispute by gaining the support of the areas 100,000 engineering workers in the half day dispute. On the Friday before the day of the strike, only 3 firms had actually voted to support the stoppage.⁷⁴ Two days before the half day strike, and on the day, 600 engineers at Manchester Dry Dock voted to come out in sympathy with the Crossley dispute, a dramatic turn of events took place within the Stockport AEU DC. The committee, which had repeatedly called for recognition, were informed minutes before a meeting to discuss its attitudes towards the imminent 'general strike', that the AEU EC could in no circumstances give official support to the Crossley strike.

The AEU EC ruled that as no agreement existed between the union and the engineering employers on the issue of redundancy, there was no way the dispute could become official. It argued that the only

way to settle the dispute was to challenge the victimisation case through procedure. This meant that the strike would have to be called off. After a three hour meeting the Stockport DC, on a narrow majority finally agreed to accept the position of the EC. On the 4 March it ruled,

- "1 The men be recommended to go back to work and that Bro. Blackburn apply for victimisation pay.
- 2 That the DC apply for an immediate Conference of the local employers' federation to discuss the 'victimisation'.
- 3 That the EC be recommended, on the return to work of the men, to pay dispute benefit retrospectively for the period of the strike".⁷⁵

The EC, not willing to back a strike which it did not consider the EEF would back down over, felt it could head off a possible wider conflict by salvaging the position of Blackburn through gaining an understanding over how redundancy selection should be undertaken. The intervention proved decisive. The Stockport DC decision was the main front page headline in the Saturday edition of the Manchester Evening News.⁷⁶ Though it remained uncertain what level of support would be expressed on the Monday, the Manchester engineering strike proved to be a flop. The large engineering plants, A V Roe, Platt Bros., Mather and Platt, all reported full attendances for their Monday afternoon shifts. Fairey Aviation, the nearest large firm to Crossley Motors, took no action. Only 2,000 workers from 4 firms, out of the area's 100,000 engineering workers stopped work. Less than 700 workers attended the demonstration. Metropolitan-Vickers, the largest and strongest organised of the areas engineers, had not taken a decision on what form of support to give to the Crossley strike. With this level of rank and file support the strike committee began

to concentrate upon shop steward committees. Bill Gallagher the vehicle builders convenor, at the beginning of the strikes fourth week, stated,

"This will be the final and decisive week in the Crossley strike".⁷⁷

The Strike Committee sent a speaker to address 8,000 workers at Metropolitan-Vickers the day following the half day strike. The firms shop stewards agreed to ballot the workforce on sympathy action. On the 9 March, a meeting of Stockport shop stewards from 31 of the towns engineering firms met to register their strong criticism against the failure of the AEU EC to support the Crossley case. On the 14 March, 3 buses were organised to transport over 150 Metropolitan-Vickers shop stewards to the Manchester AEU headquarters in Rusholme, to consider "practical measures" to help the Crossley strike.⁷⁸ On the 16 March, the local AEU officials, after informal soundings with the employers association, arranged to meet the strike committee to head off this new offensive. After a 3 hour meeting, the strike committee eventually agreed to end the strike on assurances for,

"Negotiations to re-open and no victimisation"⁷⁹

The five week dispute came to an end on 17 March. By the end of the year, all the members of the Crossley strike committee had lost their jobs. A further redundancy took place later in the year which included 2 AEU shop stewards. The AEU leadership persisted with trying to defend workplace organisation through procedure. On the 8 December, R Openshaw, (AEU EC), in a central conference, held over the redundancy methods at Crossley,^{and} called upon the EEF to put pressure upon the local works management,

"What we are asking you to do is to have a talk with your local people and remove this atmosphere, not of suspicion, but of reality that all is not well within the works when it comes to the method of handling redundancy, particularly when shop stewards are involved".⁸⁰

The federation, however, would not involve itself in infringing the power of decision of works management in the question of redundancy. They even questioned whether labour relations were particularly^{ly} more difficult than anywhere else. The chairman pointed to a newly formed works committee after the dispute. The committee, however, contained none of the shop stewards who had been connected with the earlier dispute. The management acknowledged the need to re-establish a seven man works committee, but had effectively liquidated shop floor militancy during a recession, which had been built around the dismissal of the central figure in the workplace, John Blackburn. The lack of unity within the trade union leadership on how to handle the redundancy question and the absence of a redundancy policy within the CSEU, forced the initiative back upon workplace organisation. The commitment by the AEU leadership to resolving redundancy questions within procedure, though averting a wider conflict, failed to get reinstatement. Though defeated, the Crossley shop stewards had taken the first steps to organise support through a committee of contacts at other plants in the vehicles group. The main strategy, however, centred upon gaining the active support at workplace level in the engineering industry of the North West. No attempts were made to gain support in the West Midlands car plants.

During 1950, two strikes over redundancy arose at Duple Motor Bodies, in North London. Both involved the selection of shop steward committee members and the works convenor. Both disputes were seen

as attempts by the management to take advantage of a changeover in production methods during a period of recession to remove the shop floor leadership. The disputes at Duple's were successful in gaining reinstatement. They were to pave the way for not just an offensive against employer control, but also for a wider network of workplace contact across the British motor industry. The management at Duple had established a reputation for taking a tough line against union organisation in their plants. The motor bodies plant employed 1,200 workers, the majority of whom were members of craft unions. The NUVB had 700 members, there were some 250 SMW, while the rest of the labour force were either in the woodcutting machinists, the electricians, or the AEU.⁸¹

In September 1949, the management, in a display of its opposition to workplace unionism, had sacked the works convenor for addressing a meeting over a complaint which had arisen from canteen facilities at the firm. Over 1,000 workers had struck for four days before the issue was put into procedure.⁸² Eventually a national Arbitration Tribunal upheld the position of the management. On the 1 June 1950, a 16 day strike began in the sheet metal shop. The management gave an hours notice to 35 sheet metal workers of redundancy. The 35 not only included Les Buck, the works convenor, but the whole of the metal shop stewards committee. A meeting of the remaining metal workers was called in works time, after which the management promptly dismissed all 200 who had attended the meeting. On the 3 June, the London branch of the SMW voted for a position of,

"All back or none".⁸³

The Duple management were seeking to undermine the cohesiveness of the metal workers shop organisation during the rundown of production

on the first post war car models. They were, in particular, attempting to remove the Communist Party influence on the metal workers shop committee, in order to pave the way for the introduction of a new press and later that year, a complete changeover to a new assembly line whose construction was almost complete.⁸⁴ All these changes would involve the firms shop stewards in renegotiating wage rates. The policy established by the London Branch was to stand behind the membership. The Branch rejected a management suggestion to reinstate the 200 dismissed, on condition the original 35 redundancy notices stood. The metal workers agreed

".....to secure a general resumption without the imposition of the notices on the 35 originally declared redundant".⁸⁵

On the 10 June, the SMW Branch agreed three basic demands which were later endorsed by the union leadership.

- "1 No dismissal while work is put out to sub-
 contactors and no work to be handled from
 sub-contractors.
- 2 The cut in the production programme to be restored
 which will maintain full employment for some
 future months. In the meantime alter work to be
 sought.
- 3 Full consultation on production and employment
 problems with the stewards".⁸⁶

Although only the sheet metal workers were in dispute, other unions in the works refused to handle sub-contracted work which arrived at the firm. The vehicle builders agreed not to undertake work normally carried out by the metal workers. After three weeks on strike, the management conceded the metal workers demands. Not only were the 200 dismissed reinstated, but the whole of the metal shop committee, including Les Buck, the works convenor. An important factor in the dispute was the official backing of the SMW union. This not only helped to curtail the supplies from sub-

contracting but signalled to the employer the unions resolve to fight the issue. The dispute received widespread support among the vehicle firms in North London and Duple's stewards were sent to plants in the West Midlands to outline their case. The Duple's workers saw their success not just in terms of their own workplace but as a victory for workplace organisation throughout the federation. In a letter of thanks published in the Metal Worker they stated,

"To date no further mention of redundancy has been made by the management. Full production has been restored on the job which was the cause of the disputed redundancy.

Having achieved the aims which we set out in our original circular, and maintained throughout the dispute, we are proud of the role we have played in the defence of organisation in Duple and throughout the Federation".⁸⁷

The success of the Duple's challenge to the management control over redundancy was far from permanent. Three months later the management announced a "redundancy of an exceptional character" which would operate progressively until five-sixths of all the manual jobs were lost. The largest union affected would be the vehicle builders but the first set of 70 names also included the works convenor from the Sheet Metal shop. The Duple management along with other coachbuilders in North London, the Rootes BLSP factory, and Park Royal Vehicles, were attempting to subject the coach and body building sections to time study work methods at a time of recession and at a moment when established production was being run down in preparation for a new round of models from the Autumn Motor Show. The first redundancy notices brought a stoppage of the 1,000 strong workforce on the 19 October. A statement issued by the Strike Committee said,

"This has been provoked by a stiff-necked management. They think they can smash any body and that we should take it..... This is the fourth strike we've had this year and the cause is the same everytime - the management is trying by one means or another to smash trade unionism in the factory".⁸⁸

The Duple management had first attempted to negotiate from a position of strength, with a drop in production of the old models and the rundown of the existing production lines. Due to shop floor opposition they abandoned negotiations, refusing to put the outstanding issues into procedure. Their attempt to systematically make all but 20 per cent of the workforce redundant before offering new employment on the new completed assembly tracks, where the sheet metal and coachbuilding work would be controlled by time study, led not just to a unity of the workplace but all five main unions, including the AEU, made the dispute official.

A mass meeting of the workforce endorsed a four point policy

- "1 Withdrawal of all notices.
- 2 Full inquiry by ministries concerned into the reasons for the sackings.
- 3 Maintenance of present rates and conditions.
- 4 Any men who have been dismissed to have first opportunity for re-engagement".⁸⁹

The Duple dispute with its combined attack upon rates and workplace organisation through redundancy at a time of recession and changeover, not only unified national union leaderships with the shop floor, but provided the first serious attempt to extend the redundancy issue within the motor industry to other centres. The Austin JSSC set up a special sub-committee to assist the Duple workers, while the Standard JSSC pledged to give any support requested by the Duple workforce. Motor firms in the London area

levied two hours pay per week per worker throughout the dispute. Large sums were reported to have been collected in the Coventry factories. The management again attempted to separate the workplace leadership from the shop floor. At the end of the fourth week of the dispute the management intimated that they would reinstate all but the first 200 declared redundant, provided there was an acknowledgement that,

"Questions relating to redundancy were still the sole prerogative of the management. A works conference to consider the outstanding issues".⁹⁰

These were rejected by a mass meeting, as the first 200 contained the works convenor and several shop stewards. On the 18 November the Employers called upon the MOL to invoke Order 1305 to get a return to work. The MOL were reluctant to use their powers of intervention in this way but arranged ^{for the} case to go to a National Arbitration Tribunal. On 11 December the Tribunal, allowed both parties to reach a mutual decision. The management and the National officials agreed,

- "1 All men who were at work on 18 October to return to work on Monday 18 December.
- 2 An immediate works conference to be called to discuss the existence and extent of redundancy within the departments and the steps necessary to overcome it.
- 3 Withdrawal of all dismissal notices and no notices to be issued until there has been a decision at a National conference on, or after, 27 December. In no case notices to be issued before the 27 December.
- 4 Works Conference would also consider priority of re-engagement for any men who had been or would be redundant".⁹¹

This settlement was hailed by the Duple's works committee as a significant breakthrough in the question of the control over

redundancy. For the first time in the post war period, a federated employer, though after an eight week strike, was conceding that the "existence and extent of redundancy" would become subject to discussion, with the objective of finding ways to overcome it. This was a breach in the established position of sole employer prerogative. Furthermore all the shop stewards who were included in the list of 200, plus the convenor, were to be reinstated to the position before the notices were given. The Duple workplace organisation celebrated their success in a pamphlet they published, entitled "How Duple's Won".⁹² The introduction, setting out the history of the dispute claimed,

"The employers attempted to use redundancy as a weapon to smash trade union organisation within the factory..... A notable advance for trade unionist everywhere was achieved when the employers were forced to accept redundancy as a matter for negotiation through the normal channels of procedure, with no dismissal notices issued except by agreement, and until a national conference has considered the circumstances".⁹³

Not only did the workplace organisation return in tact but the employer advantage of dismissal of shop stewards, being subject to the final stage of procedure after the worker had lost his job, was replaced by the maintenance of the status quo until central conference.

The strategy employed by the Duple management to bring about a change among the traditional working practices and wage rates, through redundancy and the removal of workplace representatives, in a period of a fall in trade, had gravely underestimated the resistance of the workforce and even the capacity for unity among the national officials. In the end, the point of maximum workplace weakness, the rundown of production on the existing assembly tracks, became its position of strength, as Duple's began to receive

orders for new models in the Autumn season. The management could not have envisaged that the workforce would be prepared to endure such a long strike in support of its workplace organisation. Nor could the employer have anticipated the kind of support received from other sections of the motor industry for such an issue, which boosted the morale of the labour force. At the beginning of 1951, however, the position of the motor trade generally was far from being in a healthy position. Shortages of raw materials were increasing the practice of short time working. The earnings of car workers were estimated to have fallen by a fifth. A spokesman for manufacturing industry, in the West Midlands, Mr W G Robin, claimed on the 10 January,

"Industry in the Midlands has never been in a graver position".⁹⁴

On the 1 February, further government restrictions over the supply of raw materials to the industry came into affect. The SMMT maintained that production in the motor industry was having to be cut back by between 15 to 20 per cent, during the early part of 1951.⁹⁵ The tempo of redundancy and short time working began to increase. Rootes, Rover, Jaguar, and Singer were on short time. Morris Cowley in Oxford was on a four-day week, large parts of Pressed Steel were working short time.⁹⁶ In Birmingham a third of the 20,000 Austin workers were put on a four day week.⁹⁷ In March, Fisher Ludlow declared a quarter of its workforce redundant. At Standard Motors, the JSSC had been informed of a possible 15 per cent redundancy, while Armstrong Siddeley announced a job loss of 10 per cent.⁹⁸ The COV NUVB BC, on hearing reports of the state of trade in the district gave full support to opposition to redundancy. At its meeting on the 5 March, the committee took a strong line against redundancy.

"Agreed: that we recommend they fight the issue to the last ditch. We are deeply concerned with the position and recommend that they claim organised short time working and fight the issue with every means in their power".⁹⁹

In the midst of the growing worker insecurity a strike of vehicle builders had already begun at the Jaguar plant in Coventry. On the 23 February, the Jaguar management issued redundancy notices to 9 vehicle builders working in the body shop on the Mark Five saloon. This production line was being run down and a new model, the Mark Seven, was to be introduced. Owing to changes in the bought-in body panels from Pressed Steel, less labour would be required for the new model. The nine redundancy notices were given in accordance with the previous practice applied to 33 vehicle builders declared redundant at the beginning of the year; no prior consultation but a week's wages in lieu of notice. Two factors, however, were different in the redundancy of the 9. Firstly, a number of vehicle builders had been offered alternative employment on the new lines and secondly, two of the 9, Strong and Holden, were NUVB shop stewards, Strong being the senior steward for Jaguar's 368 vehicle builders. A works conference was arranged with the NUVB official to discuss the case. A meeting of the COV BC claimed that both Strong and Holden had been "put on the spot", while other workers with less service had been progressively transferred from the section to other areas of employment. The NUVB COV BC called upon the NUVB Jaguar stewards to call a meeting before the arranged date of the works conference, the Thursday before the notices expired, with a view to taking industrial action. The meeting, held during the Wednesday afternoon shift, called for the suspension of notices or there would be a strike. The management, prompted by the intervention of stewards from other unions, hastily

called an informal meeting of the vehicle builders local officials, and agreed to suspend notices for 24 hours. At the conference, the Jaguar management offered to reinstate all 9 on the redundancy list and offered alternative work. They also agreed to discuss future arrangements for redundancy selection, with the union, provided those proposals were acceptable. The alternative employment, however, was that the senior steward, Strong, would be transferred to the experimental department, while Holden would be offered a job in the service department. The vehicle builders, whose main source of employment lay in the trim and body shops, saw this as a failure by the Jaguar management to first dispose of their workplace leadership through redundancy, but saw to isolate them from the membership prior to a round of price negotiation on the new Mark Seven. The management proposals were rejected. The redundancies stood and a 31 day strike of 358 members of the NUVB began in defence of the workplace organisation.

What lay behind the actions of management was their acknowledgement of the growing power of workplace organisation, which they associated in the NUVB, with a growing communist party influence, both in its workplace and even among some of its national officials.¹⁰⁰ The course of the dispute, however, disclosed the extent to which both the EEF and the Jaguar management sought to exercise considerable pressure upon the NUVB general secretary, who became increasingly isolated from his own EC, but it also revealed the considerable reluctance upon the part of an elected minority Labour Government, to wane to the pressure of employers for state intervention under Order 1305, when the solidarity of the vehicle builders failed to be broken by the unions general secretary. This commitment by the NUVB workers, was largely undertaken within the unions tendency to

fight its own issues in isolation of other unions.

For the Cov EEA, and the Jaguar management, the dispute was about workplace power, in particular the growing tendency within the NUVB to ignore procedure as a means of settling redundancy issues. The secretary of the Cov EEA was infuriated by the vehicle builders call to hold a meeting in works time. He immediately reported the incident to the EEF, on 27 February, stating that he had been informed that the NUVB DC

".... do not consider procedure appropriate to settle disputes of this character they are, therefore, going to take the law into their own hands".¹⁰¹

and,

".... a flagrant case of flouting procedure agreement not only by the men but also the district committee..... action of the district committee and stewards very close to incitement to strike action".¹⁰²

He maintained that the only distinction between the local officials and the DC was that the former "recommended", while the latter "instructed".¹⁰³ On the first day of the strike, the Cov EEA Secretary wrote informing the EEF,

"It's quite certain that the matter is now completely outside the hands of the district officials. There is a desire for the Federation to take it up with the NUVB NE".¹⁰⁴

The failure of officials at local level to exercise a constitutional influence over the Jaguar membership, led the employers association to seek action to be exercised at National level, through the influence of the EEF. The approach of the federation was two-fold. Firstly, to establish what influence the MOL could bring at both National and local level. On the 1 March, the Cov EEA Secretary was asked by the federation secretary to,

".....find out whether they have got a Ministry of Labour man in Coventry who is any good, and who is likely to be able to help, if so, then we should see that he is properly directed from Headquarters. If he thinks it will help we shall certainly be sure that the Chief Industrial Commissioner take a personal interest in this matter".105

Secondly, the federation sought to put pressure upon H Halliwell, the NUVB General Secretary. Following a conversation between the federation secretary E C Hoppald, and Halliwell on the 12 March, it became clear that the union leader opposed the strike action. He had informed the federation,

"....that shop stewards could not be considered sacrosant....."106

He acknowledged, however, that in practice management attempts to interfere with shop stewards were seen by the membership as moves to break down the organisation. Halliwell, had been able to prevent the dispute from being declared official, at an emergency meeting of the union, but he would, despite his personal inclinations, have to adhere to any decision taken on the 16 March, the date of the next EC meeting.

The strategy, from the employers side was directed towards preventing the dispute becoming official, and to seek to demoralise the strikers by encouraging their isolation from both their union, and from within their workplace. On the 13 March, the MOL informed the federation,

"Halliwell is not in sympathy with the present strike but that he wanted all the moral support he could get in order to counter the attitude of his EC, which meet on Friday, 16 March, to decide to make the dispute official. Time factor, is therefore important in that as much pressure as possible should be brought to bear on Halliwell and the EC prior to the meeting as the situation would be much more difficult if the strike is declared official".107

With only a few days to the EC meeting, the Jaguar management issued a detailed statement which appeared in the Coventry press placing the responsibility for the dispute upon the unions failure to accept a constitutional method for resolving the issue, and denied that the status of the stewards was under threat.

"It has been made clear to the union that the alternative work need not in any way affect the status of the stewards, and it is disappointing to the Company to feel that the union are not prepared to settle this dispute by the proper agreed procedure".¹⁰⁸

The day before the EC meeting the Jaguar management announced to the press, that in addition to 300 workers they had laid off due to the strike, a further 3,000 would be without work by the weekend, all of whom would be members of unions not party to the dispute.¹⁰⁹ The Works management at Jaguar were seeking to gain the support from other unions by stressing that the redundancy had been carried out in a manner that applied to all workers. The importance of this attempt to divide union stewards was communicated in a letter from Orr, the works manager, and Happold, on the 14 March,

".....Some value in having the collaboration of shop stewards from other unions that these were the practices and principles under which redundancy has always taken place".¹¹⁰

The management did not find it difficult to utilise the existing divisions in the workplace organisation. The AEU DC Secretary had had to visit Jaguar to investigate allegations the AEU members were carrying out the work of vehicle builders. On the 7 March, the AEU DC had only just carried a resolution,

"that our shop stewards on Jaguar Cars be advised to do nothing to impede NUVB members in their fight against victimisation".¹¹¹

An amendment that the matter be held in abeyance, until a decision

on whether the dispute would be made official, was only narrowly defeated. Furthermore, a statement to the press by the Secretary of the Jaguar shop stewards committee, A Brittain, and A Wood, the Jaguar AEU convenor, criticised the action of the vehicle builders. They claimed,

"Had the dispute been discussed through constitutional channels a decision would have been reached by now".¹¹²

Further pressure upon the vehicle builders came as a result of the actions of the MOL not to pay unemployment benefit for those laid off, but not directly party to the dispute. On the day before the NUVB EC meeting, the national leadership of 7 unions with memberships at Jaguar met Halliwell, and later issued a statement that members of their union were unemployed as a consequence of a dispute which they were not involved in.¹¹³ Despite the concerted pressure upon the general secretary from the federation, national trade union officials, and the MOL, it was becoming clear that the defence of the NUVB organisation at Jaguar, was not just strongly held in the workplace, but that from the past experiences of redundancy in Coventry, a majority of the EC were prepared to stand behind their membership. The MOL reported to the EEF on the morning of the NUVB EC decision,

"Halliwell is on our side and doing all he can to rectify the position but is up against serious opposition from his people, not a great deal of hope of an early settlement unless Strong is re-employed in the body shop".¹¹⁴

Later that day the decision was made declaring the strike official. No resumption of work would take place unless both redundant stewards were reinstated and the senior steward returned to the body shop. After two weeks, with a failure to break the resolve of the Jaguar vehicle builders, the MOL was still advising the employers against invoking order 1305. Not wishing to face a confrontation with the

Courts the MOL were suggesting that if the dispute were to be reported, the MOL would decide that the issue would have first to go through engineering procedure. They therefore advised that informal channels should be used to get a return to work. On the 19 March, informal negotiation began between the NUVB general secretary and the secretary of the COV EEA. This had been arranged following contacts between the Cov EEA and Jack Jones, secretary of the COV CSEU DC. On the 20 March, a proposal by the Cov EEA, previously negotiated with Halliwell, for arbitration of the dispute was rejected by the membership at a mass meeting. The Jaguar management issued a statement claiming they were now 'powerless'; and unable to bring about a solution following the decision of the vehicle builders.

"In the informal talks which took place between the employers association and the union officials during the weekend, it was stressed on behalf of the company that they were quite powerless to take any action to put to an end the strike as the agreement between the employers federation and the union which provides for a settlement of the dispute, through constitutional channels had been violated by the new cease work action".¹¹⁵

The conditions for arbitration presented to the workforce were that the company would be willing to accept the outcome, provided that in the meantime there was a return to work, and the two shop stewards accept the offer of alternative employment pending the arbitration decision. This rejection by the mass meeting led to the Coventry management demanding a tough line being adopted by the MOL. On the 5 April, the federation were informed that Weekes, COV EEA secretary, and, W Lyons, managing director of Jaguar, were prepared to meet the industrial commissioner at the MOL.

"Both felt it absurd that there should be a law of the land - even if this might be altered - and that no effort was being made to see it was obeyed. Useless to have a meeting locally, it must now be handled at a high level".¹¹⁶

The Employers in Coventry were wanting Order 1305 to be exercised against the vehicle builders. For the Jaguar management the dispute had become a straight conflict between management control and the vehicle builders workplace organisation. On the 16 March, the works manager had submitted a detailed account of events to the EEF and the MOL. This concluded,

"Consideration of all circumstances leads to the conclusion that the union have absolutely no grounds on which they can take this case through constitutional procedure with any possibility of success, as the main purpose of the strike is to establish the right of the workers to over-rule the all-time prerogative of company managements to place workers (within of course their sphere of trade) on whatever sections or jobs where they may be required".¹¹⁷

In a personal letter to Sir Godfrey Ince, MOL, W Lyons, the Jaguar managing director, after complaining at the failure of the MOL to,

".....make no attempt to deal with this illegal strike"¹¹⁸

went on to claim,

"Unfortunately, there is a strong communist influence which takes very good care that the workers, the majority of whom I am quite sure have a sincere wish to return to work, are given no fair opportunity of considering any proposals which the company may put forward".¹¹⁹

The managements' fear was that not only did they not have the power to end the dispute, but that should they lose, they would even further strengthen the position of workplace organisation. An attempt to re-open the factory on the 28 March had failed to induce any of the vehicle builders to return, even after four weeks on strike. On the 9 April, C Gallagher, the NUVB organiser for the South Midlands, responded to the public statements attacking the NUVB, by the management over the strike. In a letter in the Coventry press he wrote,

"It is regretable but true, that there is no recognised process of obtaining a settlement in alleged victimisation cases. The NUVB is deeply concerned that this should be so. Considerable numbers of trade unionists have suffered hardship and long periods of unemployment because of their trade union activities and the only redress open to them is strike action by their workmates".120

The momentum of the conflict began to move against the Jaguar management. Deliveries for North American contacts, received at the previous Autumn's Motor Show, were overdue. Furthermore, in federation circles and within the MOL, doubts surrounding the validity of the managements case, should it eventually go to arbitration, began to be voiced. The initial offer by management of "suitable alternative employment which would automatically cancel the redundancy notices", raised questions of whether it was really a question of the location of the two stewards rather than an actual redundancy which was the issue. Their case appeared further weakened by the suggestion to re-examine the basis upon which future redundancy selections would be made. On the 5 April the Cov EEA secretary accepted the opinion of the federation,

"...that their case might have been weakened by their attempt to avoid trouble by suggesting that in future they might be prepared to arrange redundancies on departmental basis, but felt if the men could be got back to work they would very likely get practically everything they want".121

After taking a tough line for five weeks against the Jaguar vehicle builders throughout the strike, the management side were left having to find a face-saving formula upon which to get a return to work. On the 11 April, Sir Robert Gould, the Chief Conciliation Officer, announced that the MOL would begin an inquiry into the dispute. The inquiry lasted less than a day. As Jaguar management said they would be willing to devise a method for selecting redundancies upon a departmental rather than a

section basis, the MOL left both sides to find their own solution.

The management side, however,

"...stressed", to the conciliator, "that they did not wish to make it appear that the workers had gained a victory and therefore they could not agree to any inclusion in the form of wording of any reference to the fact that they were proposed to institute a procedure for departmental selection".¹²²

On the 12 April, at separate interviews between the union and management representatives the basis for a return to work was agreed,

- "1 a firm could not employ men for whom they had no work.
- 2 there could be no special privileges for shop stewards converseley there should be no discrimination by a firm against shop stewards.
- 3 On a resumption of work on the status quo, an immediate conference would be held with the question of redundancy".¹²³

The union leadership accepted the wording of the statement, in order to avoid embarrassing the management, after being ^{assured} that Jaguar would not oppose redundancy selection upon a departmental basis. A return to work took place on 16 April with full reinstatement of the NUVB shop stewards. On 18 April a redundancy procedure was signed by Jaguar management and all the firms unions. The agreement, which had 10 clauses, though it would not prevent redundancies occuring in the future, nor would it necessarily immune shop stewards from redundancy selection, was intended to prevent the arbitrary actions of management seeking to weaken the workplace organisation through their prerogative over the question of redundancy, or right to transfer labour, within the workplace.

"Jaguar Cars Limited - Agreed Redundancy Procedure."18 April 1951

- 1 The ultimate responsibility in any redundancy must rest with the company. Trends of employment capacity will be notified to the shop stewards.
- 2 The redundancy list will be raised within the production workers as a whole, based on the trade of the individual at the time the redundancy occurs, and according to his or her length of continuous service with the company.
- 3 The experimental and service departments to be treated as separate departments.
- 4 A list of trade groups will be available.
- 5 Representation may be made in the case of personal hardship for the consideration of the company. This hardship must be real, and capable of confirmation by the chief steward of the union concerned.
- 6 Skill and ability within the employees trade may also be put forward for consideration. Here again the final responsibility must rest with the company.
- 7 Where due to circumstances, it is necessary to discharge men at short notice, two days notice will be given if practicable, so that queries can be dealt with. List will be handed to secretary of shop stewards committee before notices are confirmed.
- 8 Where a weeks notice is given, any queries and adjustments can be dealt with during that week. Lists will be handed to secretary of shop stewards committee at the beginning of the week in question.
- 9 For the purpose of redundancy, all employees are treated as members of a trade group, and no individual shall receive preferential treatment, nor shall the company discriminate other than as provided above.
- 10 The company will at all times consider ex-employees of the company together with other applicants, for suitable vacancies that may occur in the future".¹²⁴

The agreement compromised EEF policy towards redundancy. Redundancy decisions at Jaguar were not only to be subject to a procedure agreement, with the unions, but it acknowledged a role for both the secretary of the shop stewards committee, and senior shop stewards for the particular unions concerned. Furthermore,

management had agreed to notify the stewards of employment prospects. The agreement accepted positions of seniority in workplace organisation, and gave commitments not to discriminate, in redundancy selection. The absolute discretion of management was being compromised, and communication between the management and the workforce would be upon the basis of shop stewards rather than JPC's. More than anything previous, the agreement provided the basis for defending workplace organisation in a redundancy situation. The redundancy agreement at Jaguar went beyond federation policy, both in regard to shop stewards, and in terms of the control over the redundancy process. Within six weeks of the ending of the Jaguar, strike the motor industry in the West Midlands was again at the centre of stoppages arising out of the redundancy of workplace representatives. At Carbodies, in Coventry, the whole of the unionised workforce stopped for three weeks in June, after the management had dismissed the chairman of the works committee. During the same month, in Birmingham, the Austin plant came to a standstill for four days following the redundancy of two AEU stewards. In both cases, the issue of the control over the process of decision making in a redundancy, lay behind what was perceived by the workplace organisations as attempts on behalf of the employers to weaken workplace organisation.

The management at Carbodies had established a reputation in Coventry for their opposition to workplace trade unionism. Towards the end of 1950 the AEU DO, Billy Stokes, had approached the management over the question of shop steward recognition. During the course of these informal meetings, two members of the AEU, Woodward and Hudson, were transferred out of the toolroom and into the press shop. Woodward had only recently been elected toolroom steward,

while Hudson had taken an active interest in the union. When asked for an explanation, the management had informed the DO that the move was temporary, and due to a fall in work. It was indicated that their employment as setters for the press shop would be for about 6-8 weeks, after which work would be expected to have picked up in the toolroom.¹²⁵ In December, however, both Woodward and Hudson were given 34 hours notice of redundancy, as there was no longer enough work in the press shop for them. As a result the AEU toolroom workers walked out on the 13 December. The management issued dismissal notices to all those on strike, and then began to rebuild its toolroom workforce. When the AEU DO contacted the employer over the question of reinstatement he was informed that Carbodies would accept all those dismissed from the toolroom, but were not willing to remove the 3 new recruits they had made during the period when the toolroom workers were dismissed.¹²⁶ These conditions for reinstatement were accepted, but this still left the issue of Woodward and Hudson unresolved. The AEU put this into procedure. At a reconvened works conference held on the 19 March, the AEU delegation argued that Woodward and Hudson were unfairly dismissed, that they were given inadequate notice, and that Carbodies should reinstate them to their original positions in the toolroom, particularly as they had during the strike, recruited three additional workers, one of whom was doing jobs similar to their members who were discharged.

The conference heard that a foreman had said to Woodward,

"....that they would get him out of the establishment on any pretext or other which the union could not contest".¹²⁷

For the AEU, Cyril Taylor, DS, stated, of the move to the press shop,

"We did express our fear that the transfer was the first step to these men going outside".¹²⁸

The firms case was that they had under-estimated the decline in trade, and found that there had to be a redundancy in the press shop. They then however, went on to question the suitability of Woodward and Hudson for toolroom work. The conference chairman stated,

"....they are not exactly toolroom people in every instance. They have a background which does not entitle them really to be called toolroom workers; but they have trained in this particular type of job which is done in the toolroom, which is heavy die finishing".¹²⁹

The employers were pointing to Woodward's previous employment as a taxi driver, and Hudson, who worked as a progress clerk prior to his job in the motor industry. Although similar points could be made against a significant proportion of Coventry car workers, the employers argument was that the discharge of the two AEU workers was due to a genuine redundancy, that there presently existed no vacancies in the toolroom, and that both workers concerned could only be considered for particular, rather than general positions in the toolroom. Five months after the redundancy, the case eventually reached central conference at York on 13 April. From the employers side it was seen as another example of shop steward power. The central conference chairman proclaimed, to the AEU national officials.

"You have my sympathy.... From time to time your members put you in the invidious position of having to bring these shockingly weak cases up. Immediately one of your members gets 'shop steward' attached to his designation, it means he can almost push the executive around as he likes".¹³⁰

Referring to the allegation by the supervisor to get rid of Woodward, the chairman dismissed it,

"He probably suffered from liver, and at sometime or other he may very well have used the expression which you suggest he used".¹³¹

The conference agreed that both Woodward and Hudson should be paid 44 hours, instead of the 34 hours, they had received, in lieu of notice, but were not willing to concede that either had been wrongfully dismissed. The firm were however prepared to consider them for re-employment. It was clear from the works conference that this offer was restricted to one particular job. Rejecting these terms, and registering failure to agree, Openshaw, from the AEU EC, remarked,

".....we cannot accept this finding. There is no guarantee that the men will be re-employed. The firm have only said that these men will be considered for re-employment and if they are considered and not employed, they (the firm) will have carried out the obligations of this finding".¹³²

The conference findings did not call for 'reinstatement' but rather 'consideration' for re-employment. It consequently left the whole question entirely at the employers discretion^{of}, what course of action would be taken; neither Woodward or Hudson were found employment at Carbodies. At the beginning of June, however, a conflict over the issue of redundancy again appeared at Carbodies. This time it involved the sheet metal shop.

Shortly after the signing of the Jaguar redundancy procedure agreement, the sheet metal unions, during a period of falling trade approached the Carbodies management with a view to establishing a similar agreement. In the course of the period in which the discussions were being held with the employer, a worker in the sheet metal shop was declared redundant, due to the shortage of work. The sheet metal shop immediately stopped work. The company refused

to negotiate until there had been a return to work. The shop committee persuaded the men to recommence so discussions could take place. Before the meeting got under way, however, the management discharged the SMW senior shop steward and chairman of the works committee on grounds that he was a "trouble-maker".¹³³ He was escorted off the firms premises without being allowed to collect his own tools. All 54 of the firms sheet metal workers went out on strike.

This dismissal of the senior steward had come after a recruiting campaign by the unions. That evening, 6 June, the NUVB monthly meeting heard a report of the events which stated,

"A drive by members of all unions to organise this firm had led to the firms sacking of the chief steward of the sheet metal workers. All the members of that union were on strike and there was a very strong feeling that other unions would soon be out in support of them".¹³⁴

The Cov NUVB agreed,

".... that on no account must we touch any work normally done by sheet metal workers.... any action taken by our members at Carbodies will have our full support".¹³⁵

The dismissal of the SMW senior steward had arisen directly out of the managements redundancy of a worker from the metal shop; the dismissal of the senior steward was considered to be a direct attack upon workplace organisation. Five days later, 11 June, 14 vehicle builders, from the paint shop were dismissed because of incidents associated with the strike of metal workers. This resulted in all but a few of the firms 450 strong workforce walking out to attend a meeting arranged at the AEU Hall. The approach of management to both the issue of redundancy and its attitude towards workplace organisation in general, not only unified the shop floor but brought about a common approach from within the

Coventry union officials. It was the Cov CSEU, of which Jack Jones, the TGWU local official, was secretary, rather than the workplace organisation, which was to play the decisive leadership role.

At the AEU Hall, although the workforce elected their strike committee, and made arrangements for pickets, it was the local full time officials who addressed the meeting, and who agreed to append their names to the financial appeal to support the strike. The Cov CSEU reaffirmed its support for the action taken outside procedure, at its DC meeting it unanimously agreed,

"that this meeting considers the stoppage of work at Carbodies is fully justified and strongly recommends affiliated unions to give official support to it".¹³⁶

The CSEU officials then took a collection for the strike fund. When the Cov AEU learned that some of the toolroom workers had not come out on strike, the AEU DO, along with the DS, went to the works and persuaded all but two of the membership to join the strike. Furthermore, on the 18 June the 460 workers on strike staged a march to the factory to collect their outstanding wages. The demonstration, which was accompanied by Motor cycles, and cycles, colourfully decorated with posters proclaiming "We want fair organisation not victimisation", and "We want full trade union recognition", was led by 3 of the local full time union officials.¹³⁷

Faced with such a unified force of union officials and workforce, engaged in an unconstitutional action it was the Cov EEA which took the initiative to enter into informal talks with the CSEU to secure a return to work. The association had been prepared to recommend that the firm should take the whole of the workforce back, including the senior steward from the sheet metal workers, in addition to the 14 employees from the paint shop, when it was discovered that the management had engaged 3 non-union metal workers as part of

their attempt to break the strike. Discussions immediately broke down. On the 19 June, the AEU DC lent considerable weight to this unconstitutional dispute. The night before an arranged mass meeting of the Carbodies employees. It agreed.

- "1 This DC congratulates the full-time officials on their stand against Carbodies.
- 2 This DC endorses the action of our members at Carbodies in ceasing work, pledges full support and asks the EC to declare the strike official.
- 3 This DC instructs our members not to resume work whilst any labour engaged by Carbodies after the dispute had commenced remains in their employ, as this action on the part of the company is prejudicial to any settlement.
- 4 This DC instructs the secretary to put in hand the machinery necessary to conduct a District Levy through the Branches in accordance with Rule.
- 5 The DC instructs our shop stewards to endeavour to organise weekly contributions or levies in the factories.
- 6 This DC instructs the secretary to inform the CSEU of the action we are taking in the Carbodies dispute, and advise the affiliated unions to 'black' work which is to be supplied to Carbodies or which is produced by this firm.
- 7 This DC recommend that every effort be made by the CSEU officials to obtain a case against Carbodies with a view to prosecution under Order 1305.
- 8 This DC instruct the DS to summon the members who remained at work in the toolroom of Carbodies to attend the next General Purpose Committee.
- 9 This DC reports the DO to conduct an organising meeting at Carbodies with a view to making new members".138

The day after the mass meeting which supported the officials leadership, it was reported that 4 of the 8 unions involved had made the strike official. On the 25 June, the management gave in. The Cov EEA, when confronted with such a clear demonstration of unity across unions, and between memberships and officials in the district, in addition to the endorsement of the actions by the national union

leadership, the employers association informally arranged for a settlement which conceded the full reinstatement of all those in dispute, including the senior steward of the sheet metal workers. The terms of the return to work were that a conference between the Cov EEA, and the Cov CSEU, would consider a procedure for redundancy at Carbodies.

On the 28 June the sheet metal officials proposed to the employers association that Carbodies management accept a redundancy procedure based upon the one recently established at Jaguar.¹³⁹ For the Carbodies employees this appeared as a considerable gain for workplace organisation. As with the Jaguar agreement it legitimated the role of works convenor and senior stewards in the redundancy process. At the conference, however, it became clear that while it was the actions of the trade union movement in Coventry which had brought about this victory, for the engineering federation, though they insisted upon the formal right of managerial prerogative over redundancy, they were willing to allow trade union involvement in a redundancy procedure in order to seek to contain workplace behaviour within constitutionally defined actions. The Cov EEA was mainly concerned to gain assurances that in constitutional action would not be resorted to in future redundancy situations. The association secretary asked, in Conference,

"Will the procedure laid down in the agreement between the federated and the trade unions be honoured in future? I am concerned with the recent loss of production. It is obvious that if a redundancy procedure was agreed there might be at some time in the future differences of opinion and regard to its operation. Such differences must be settled constitutionally if happy working relations are to be achieved".¹⁴⁰

For the union side, it was stated that any future differences resulting from the operation of the redundancy agreement would be

taken through "the proper procedure". However they,

".....suggested regular meetings between the representatives of higher management of the company and the stewards.... which would go a long way to achieving managements desire for better relations between the Carbodies workers and the management". 141

The two week Carbodies dispute had challenged the right of a single employer discretion in cases of redundancy. Not only did the agreement permit a role for the workplace organisation in the redundancy process, but the acknowledgement of such a role not only bestowed a legitimacy upon workplace representatives, but in Carbodies it brought about shop steward recognition.

In July the West Midlands NUVB organiser, C Elsworth, could report, some initial success for workplace organisation at Carbodies,

"In regard to organisation, we have continued our efforts here, and with the help of our loyal members, have reached a much better position, with representatives in all departments". 142

This apparent success in June, came into doubt during August.

On the 22 August, the AEU DC heard from their senior steward from Carbodies toolroom,

"...that it is apparent the management are not going to co-operate at all with the trade union movement. They had declared their intention of operating the Redundancy Procedure to suit themselves.... his co-steward in the toolroom.... resigned for domestic reasons, and that it appeared management were endeavouring to drive a wedge between the shop floor and the AEU stewards". 143

The AEU DC decided that there was little future for their membership at Carbodies. It agreed,

"That due to the dogmatic attitude of the management, any further effort to organise this factory would appear to be abortive, and we therefore request EC to authorise the withdrawal of all AEU members from this factory and place them in fresh jobs". 144

At Carbodies and Jaguar, management attempts to undermine workplace representation was strongly implicated in their repeated attempts to assert unilateral control over the redundancy process. The redundancy agreement, while acknowledging the formal rights of management, also provided a role for workplace representation in order to confine the exercise of workplace power to within the workings of procedure. Workplace recognition in the redundancy procedure did not mean control over the redundancy process. The strategy deployed by the Coventry employers association was one of acknowledging the legitimacy of works convenors and senior stewards in the redundancy procedure, while retaining a managerial control over redundancy decisions. Workplace power was to be harnessed to constitutional actions and this activity would be underwritten by a commitment on the part of the local full time officials and the CSEU, to operate the procedure. Individual employers, however, had resorted to exercising managerial discretion, when confronted with an increasing presence of workplace organisation. This had been the case at Jaguar where the management were convinced that the growth of workplace power in their assembly plant, among the vehicle builders, was closely related to a militant shop steward leadership whose actions were in some way the outcome of communist party influence. In the exercise of employer discretion at Carbodies, the works management appeared to take every opportunity which a period of recession offered, to seek to reduce the effectiveness of workplace representation. During the final days of the Carbodies conflict the management at Austin, Longbridge, during a period of extensive short time working and redundancy, sought also to challenge what it saw as a not insignificant level of communist party activity, in the increasingly effective presence of its workplace organisation. The approach of the Austin management had developed from their long

held opposition to workplace organisation.

For the Austin workplace organisation, 1950 seemed a year of considerable advance. After the completion of the modernisation of the factory, employment had risen by over 3,000 in three successive years to reach 17,758 in 1950.¹⁴⁵ Union membership had grown rapidly. By the beginning of 1951, the works committee were claiming that they were approaching their main post war objective, 100 per cent unionisation.¹⁴⁶ A more co-operative attitude appeared to be emerging, at least within the workplace organisation to the problems of inter union friction. The AEU, minute book, for example on the 26 January, reported that,

"Difficulties being experienced by certain of our members working in various shops where mixed membership was in being. Emphasised that though we should be prepared to protect members the most sensible solution was to achieve an understanding with other unions on the question of demarcation".¹⁴⁷

An important step in paving this way towards understanding was taken by the decision of the works committee to broaden union representation. Though the AEU had held a commanding influence in the Austin shop stewards committee, 1950, saw the election of an eleven man committee which had representatives from the NUVB, TGWU, Woodcutting machinists, Pattern makers, the Foundry union, ETU, the ASW, the Boilermakers, in addition to the AEU.¹⁴⁸

In the Autumn of 1950, however, the question of the steel shortage resulted in the introduction of short time working and the threat of redundancy. In December 1950, the managing director of Austin, J R Edwards, gave an understanding to the CSEU local officials, at the onset of the steel crisis, over jobs.

"....as far as possible old employees of the Austin Motor Company would have preference when reorganisation took place through redundancy".¹⁴⁹

In a works as large as Longbridge, the transferring of workers between sections in order to avoid redundancy, or the offer of priority in future job vacancies following a redundancy, all required an acceptance of an inter union movement of labour across the works. It was workplace organisation which was to provide the basis for such an acceptance. It was the workplace leadership which addressed itself to the ending of the feuding over sectional and demarcation claims. A unity among the workplace leadership at the Austin, however, arose primarily from the emergence of a common political identification among the senior shop stewards. This basis of unity was itself developed within a context of a managerial strategy which was directed at restricting the power from a proliferation, in the number of shop stewards.

Throughout the final quarter of 1950, the most frequent item in the daily notes of the convenor, was his arranging for shop steward elections.¹⁵⁰ By the end of 1950, such was the growth in the number of stewards, that there was a steward for every 51 manual workers, compared to the position in 1946 where there had been one steward for every 400, manual workers.¹⁵¹ Despite this growth the Austin management still held to its policy of not recognising, nor making provision for senior stewards of individual unions in the plant. They continued to communicate with the workplace organisation only through the works convenor. He was the only representative on the shop floor to be granted time off by the works management. Such was his importance that the management even installed a telephone next to his machine, so that he could be reached at short notice.¹⁵² The Austin management even insisted on treating the deputy convenor, George Varnom, as they would any other steward. He was not even allowed to substitute for the convenor,

when the works convenor was indisposed.

The strategy of the works management towards the growth in workplace organisation was largely based upon curbing the activities of all shop stewards primarily though denying them access to managerial decision making, and by ignoring the status of senior or chief stewards for individual unions. Wherever possible, the Austin management preferred to deal exclusively with the local full time officials, the Birmingham CSEU. Even Etheridge was denied access to these meetings. This managerial approach to workplace organisation encouraged a reliance of the workplace organisation upon the activity of the local officials. But in the workplace, over the more mundane, routine decisions, the position of the shop floor unions was heavily dependent upon the role of Etheridge, the works convenor. Although the widening of the basis of union representation on the JSSC enabled individual unions, through their senior shop stewards, a voice in the policy of workplace organisation, this attempt to unify organised labour at Longbridge was still dependent upon the strategic position held by the works convenor. Managerial attempts to curb a proliferation of shop steward power, was heavily dependent upon its circumscribing channels of communication to higher management. It was the works convenor and not the works committee which had recognition at Longbridge. A consequence of this approach to workplace organisation by the Austin management was that any influence over management in industrial relations in the workplace, was centralised around the position of works convenor. This form of centralisation, however, also assisted the influence of the communist party in workplace organisation.

In 1950, the three most important positions held on the Austin works committee were occupied by members of the communist party. Besides

Etheridge, the convenor which was clearly the most important, Varnom, held the post of chairman and deputy convenor, while John McHugh was elected to the position of secretary. Etheridge and Varnom were both members of the AEU, McHugh was the chief steward of the NUVB. This party influence in these workplace positions was out of proportion to the small, though significant number of Longbridge stewards who were considered to be either members of the CP, or were viewed as party sympathisers. In June 1951, McHugh suggested that no more than 50 of the 350 strong Austin stewards were members or sympathisers.¹⁵³ The influence of the communist party, however, was particularly evident among the senior stewards of the AEU, NUVB and the SMW. This common allegiance among the steward leadership was initially a force for unity on the works committee. The party members sought to strengthen the position of the committee in the workplace and were therefore strong advocates of widening the basis of union representation.¹⁵⁴ That the works committee should become a genuine joint committee, as opposed to one which had hitherto been largely the exclusive reserve of the AEU, was partly a reflection of the changing balance of union membership in the plant, but it was also an acknowledgement of a workable unity on the works committee between the different unions, in order to attempt to overcome the destructive tendencies towards inter union strife which arose in the workplace. It could be said, therefore, that in 1950 it was the influence of the CP in a number of unions, and more particularly among the union workplace leaderships, rather than the basic influence of individual trade unions, which was at the forefront far more open representation of different unions on the works committee. That such a workable unification appeared possible was itself also a factor arising from common political affiliations emerging in the regular meetings of senior stewards through the

works committee, and that committee's dependence upon the role of the works convenor for relations with the management.

While the liberalisation of union membership on the works committee was partly an attempt to generally strengthen organisation in the workplace, these changes in 1950 also strengthened the position of the communist membership. There, however, existed sources of opposition to these developments. Firstly the TGWU, though it did not have the largest number of elected shop stewards, was, after 1950, becoming the second largest union membership in the works.¹⁵⁵ It contained, both in the workplace, and more particularly among the sentiments of its local full time officer, strong anti-communist party attitudes.¹⁵⁶ Moreover, none of its stewards actually held an office on the works committee. Secondly, the NUVB, despite the position of McHugh, retained a frequent capacity to act independently, and sometimes in opposition to the works committee.¹⁵⁷ This was partly a reflection of the activities of its local full time officials, who had all previously worked at Austin and retained the single mindedness of the society's craft tradition.¹⁵⁸

At the Austin works, during 1951, the prospect of job security appeared threatened by the crisis in materials. The fall in production had placed a third of the plant's manual workforce on short time.¹⁵⁹ Overall employment fell by 1,000 during the course of the year.¹⁶⁰ It was on the 20 June that a first all out strike at Longbridge, over redundancy, took place. The strike was called at the initiative of the full body of Austin stewards, and without the consent of the local full time officials. The issue was a redundancy of 7 employees in No 5 machine shop, all of whom were members of the AEU. Two, Pegg and Bills, were shop stewards. Pegg,

however was a member of the communist party. During the same week, the management gave redundancy notices to 44 sheet metal workers. This list also included a shop steward, who was a party member.

For the works committee the redundancies were seen as a clear breach of the understanding given by ^{the} managing director, to J T Bolas, the secretary of the Birmingham CSEU, in December, regarding re-employment of existing employees in the event of a redundancy, at Longbridge. The workplace leadership took the view that the action on the part of management, was an attack upon shop steward organisation. The dispute, however, could not be entirely separated from the influence of the communist party, in the workplace organisation.

The origins of the 'Pegg and Bills' dispute dated back to the beginnings of the steel shortages in August 1950. An alteration in the design of a component in the Axle shop reduced the requirement of labour in No 5 machine shop. This, in addition to the fall in production in the motor industry resulted in the shop workforce being put on short time working.¹⁶¹ In April 1951, after regular periods of short time working over 6 months, the management were approached to secure a more permanent solution to the shortage of work. The stewards in the machine shop were asking for a gradual transfer of the surplus labour to other sections to enable a return back to a full working week. The management refused. They maintained that there was sufficient work available in the works which could be brought into No 5 shop. During May the shop was fully employed, but by the beginning of June it was back on short time. On the 17 June the management issued redundancy notices 7 workers in No 5 shop. They were all given a week's notice in lieu of notice, and instructed them to immediately leave the works. The two stewards

refused to accept the notice and reported events to the works committee. A meeting of all 350 Austin stewards was arranged. Meanwhile a further redundancy of 44 sheet metal workers was announced. This list also included a shop steward.¹⁶²

At the mass meeting of stewards, the central question concerned the managing directors undertaking concerning a preference to existing employees to future employment. The meeting of stewards heard a report from Etheridge that, during the previous 3 months 504¹⁶³ new employees had been recruited by the firm, while No 5 machine shop had spent most of this period working short time. The stewards called for the withdrawal of the redundancy notices and requested negotiations with the management for the redeployment of the 7 workers redundant from the machine shop. This was refused. On the 20 June a further meeting of all the stewards voted for a "stay in strike". They elected a strike committee comprising 27 stewards. Production stopped on the day shift, and the night shift on arrival at the works refused to start and returned home. At 9.30 on the 22 June, members of the works committee addressed a mass meeting of some 7,000, of the 10,500 on strike. Etheridge, the works convenor, set out the issue as the stewards saw it. He was quoted as saying in the Birmingham Mail,

"At the time of the steel shortage management met the shop stewards and came to an understanding that in the event of redundancy they would give consideration to the people at present working here rather than encourage new labour".¹⁶⁴

He went on,

"We are not silly over redundancy. Shop stewards have not said that they will not accept redundancy in any circumstances. A case came up recently when 44 sheet metal workers were made redundant and they have gone out of the factory because they are a craft union and other jobs could not be found for them".¹⁶⁵

In an oblique reference to the immigration question in the West Midlands, Etheridge went on to state,

"They (management) are starting coloured labour here and we have never been approached. We have no objection to coloured people but we don't want any fresh labour when they are Austin workers having the sack - we don't care if they are black, white or red".166

The question of race, however, was not the central issue in the actual dispute. The works committee attempted to confine the dispute to an industrial matter of trade union rights, and the right to negotiate over the understanding surrounding preference for re-employment. In the Birmingham press, however, the strike was seen as being political. As the management refused to negotiate with the works committee, the steward leadership began to view the dispute as an attack upon workplace organisation. A leaflet issued by the Austin JSSC to the mass meeting stated,

"The works committee.... convinced this is an attempt by the management to victimise two of our shop stewards and are using the other six as a cloak in the guise of redundancy.This is not a political issue!!!The issue at stake is the livelihood of trade union members, the continuance of the shop steward movement, and the right to negotiate".167

Etheridge at the mass meeting at Coften Hackett, went out of his way to assure the workforce that the strike was not political.

"....there is no red plot behind the strike... the shop stewards were trade unionists first and foremost".168

The mass meeting supported the works committee call to continue the stoppage, and for official backing to the issue from the national executives. Less than a 100 were reported to have voted against. The local press, however, continued to imply that the strike was political. The Birmingham post quoted a member of the maintenance department,

"This trouble was bound to come. Mr Pegg is a communist but an excellent shop steward. There is another excellent shop steward, also a communist among the 44 sheet metal workers redundant".¹⁶⁹

On Friday, 23 June, the front page story of the dispute in the Birmingham Mail portrayed the strike as a political struggle between the management and the shop steward organisation. The works committee decided to call a mass meeting for Monday morning, largely to answer the way the press were presenting their case. Etheridge was quoted as saying, on Saturday,

"We are not prepared to let the press break-up our strike. We will give the answers to the headlines on Monday".¹⁷⁰

During the course of the weekend the first intervention by a full time union official took place just prior to the mass meeting called by the shop stewards. He was openly critical of the shop stewards action in calling the strike without first consulting with union officials.¹⁷¹ The TGWU meeting was to determine whether their membership, almost as large as the AEU, wanted a return to work. Its stewards did not have the influence of either the AEU or the NUVB in the workplace organisation.

At the mass meeting called by the works committee the 6,000 workers in attendance voted, during a "noisy" meeting to return to work. The meeting was reported to have ended in "uproar" after, R Nester, the Chairman, of No 5 machine shop stewards criticised the

"....communist propaganda which went out daily... during the last 18 months".¹⁷²

Coming as it did, after the mounting reports in the press, from the chairman of the shop where the redundancy took place, this speech, along with the dissent among the TGWU completely split the

support for the works committee. After two attempts to take the vote the chairman of the works committee had to ask for the vote to be segregated. Eventually a clear majority of those who had moved to the left of the platform, which indicated a vote for a return to work, emerged. The leadership of the works committee, after a four day strike of 10,400 of the Longbridge workforce had been rejected over support for workplace negotiation for redundancy. While the influence of the leadership, despite their political affiliations, had been able to make remarkable progress in bringing about a general basis for unity on the works committee, which over the issue of 'Pegg and Bills' had been fully supported initially by the full body of the shop stewards, the support from the workforce appeared less certain. There was considerable backing for the workplace leadership when the issue was seen as one of redeployment in the works, but as the press began to define the issue as a straight political conflict between the workplace organisation and the management, support began to fall away. The works committee decided to call upon the full time officials to request a works conference to pursue their case through procedure.

The Pegg and Bills dispute was a considerable set back for the workplace organisation at Longbridge. Progress towards unity was almost reversed. Management continued to exercise discretion in regard to redundancy. On the 27 August, management put two AEU shop stewards on the guaranteed week, on the grounds that insufficient work existed. The management refused requests for them to be absorbed in other parts of the plant. After 3 weeks on the guaranteed week they were made redundant.¹⁷³ The works committee, asked AEU to take it up. On 3 September the management refused access for the Night shop steward to enter the works to contact the convenor, on

trade union business.¹⁷⁴

The immediate aftermath of the Pegg and Bills dispute was not confined to the works management seeking to restrict the influence of shop stewards, but there was also the affect which the experience had upon workplace organisation. The works committee became not just concerned to re-establish the support of the shop stewards for the joint committee, but they were also aware of the need to strengthen the relationship between the membership and the involvement of their stewards in the JSSC. On the 20 August Etheridge suggested that monthly reports be introduced by members of the JSSC for report backs to the membership. He argued at the works committee,

"This should be of utmost value and would help strengthen the bond between the joint shop stewards organisation and the rest of the factory workers".¹⁷⁵

The commitment of the shop stewards to the JSSC, and the relationship of the steward to the membership were viewed as the central relationships upon which workplace unity could overcome the traditions of sectionalism, and the pride of individual union independence, which appeared as a potential threat to a leadership of joint authority. Following the Pegg and Bills strike attendance at JSSC had fallen. In August, the minutes of the works committee state,

"It was decided that the convenor meet with leading shop stewards of all unions with the view to increasing attendances at meetings held on Monday night because it was felt that until we get increased attendances shop stewards could not express satisfactorily what the workers wanted".¹⁷⁶

At Austin the vital link between the leadership of the works committee and the membership was through the meeting of the JSSC rather than the mass meeting. On the 3 September the convenor reported that all the leading stewards, including the TGWU and the

SMW, had agreed to pledge their unions support for the JSSC. The demoralisation, following the Pegg and Bills dispute had been registered in an apathy towards joint organisation. This threatened to isolate the works committee from the workplace organisation; its source of communication with the membership.

Over the pursuit of reinstatement of Pegg and Bills through Procedure, a works conference held on the 24 September ended in failure to agree.¹⁷⁷ This was followed on 3 January 1952 by a local conference. Here the BW EEA representatives maintained that redundancy was a National issue over which agreement could only be arrived at between the Federation and the National union leaderships. It could not be imposed upon individual managements. The general works manager, J R Edwards, however, restated that Austin would comply with its practice of transferring redundant workers to other employment in the works, and, as far as possible, would seek to re-employ ex-Austin workers. He further suggested to the CSEU officials present that should a large scale redundancy arise the confederation would be informed.¹⁷⁸ Out of the strike the workplace organisation felt it had made some progress over the question of job security. Of the 7 redundant workers, however, only Pegg and Bills were never offered employment again at Longbridge.

During 1950-51, attempts by management to exercise their discretion over redundancy selection led to a series of lengthy disputes where leading stewards were involved. The refusal of the Federation to accept an agreement over the process of redundancy with the National union leaderships, and the inability of union officials to formulate a common policy left the defence of workplace organisation being determined by the actions in the workplace. At Duples, Jaguer, and Carbodies works managements were forced to accept the

re-instatement of leading figures in the workplace organisation following a series of costly strikes. Management, by accepting some form of local arrangement to govern the implementation of redundancies were acknowledging a level of restriction upon their powers of arbitrary discretion in the determination of their workforces. At Crossley Motors and Duples this defence of workplace organisation led to a wider interplant contact across the motor industry, but in Jaguar the vehicle builders fought the redundancy issue in isolation of union support, within the CSEU, and without much evidence of sympathy from other union memberships in the workplace. Though Communist Party influence was implicated by management in the Jaguar, Austin, and Duples disputes, this appeared as such a move to discredit the position of workplace leadership and help undermine membership support, then a genuine cause for the stoppages. At Austin where the influence of Communist shop stewards had been most felt in their encouragement of a broader union representation on the works committee, the committee, and its Communist leadership, repeatedly valued their industrial union activity above political interest. The critical factor shaping industrial action remained the workplace membership. The workplace leadership, with a dependence upon an industrial response among the membership, was continually open to divisions and rejection arising out of sectional interests and political antipathy which formed the very bases for an industrial response. A broader based works committee which may have enabled the development of common policies between the senior stewards of the main unions, still had to win and retain the support of a diversified workforce at Longbridge. During the Pegg and Bills redundancy it was the collapse of such support for the leadership that paved the way for the dismissal of two AEU stewards.

This question of policy and action between workplace organisation and membership was not just a phenomenon associated with joint committees and political influences. It could appear within a single union where no political differences were apparent. While the Pegg and Bills redundancy was taking place in Birmingham, over in the Morris Bodies plant in Coventry both the works management and the NUVB BC, plus the union's organisation in the workplace, accepted that all the membership in the paint shop should work in one gang so as to avoid a redundancy. On the 4 July the NUVB BC criticised their workplace organisation.

A report to the Branch found,

- "1 Shop stewards did not sufficiently put the policy of the Branch in respect of redundancy.
- 2 A serious mistake was made in failing to call a shop meeting to discuss the question.
- 3 We also feel that the best interests of the membership at Morris Bodies would be served by amalgamating small gangs and we desire to emphasise the importance of more shop meetings on other questions of interest to our members". 179

On the 13 August, the chief NUVB steward reported to the Branch that, after a series of meetings held in different shops to present Branch policy, both the question of re-organising small gangs and the redundancy policy were being resisted. In protest against the attitude of the workforce all the NUVB stewards had offered to resign, but the membership refused to accept this.¹⁸⁰ At Morris Bodies the sectionalism of the workgroup in small gangs was reinforcing the position of the steward but weakening the authority of the chief steward to carry out Branch policy. Eventually the Branch officials had to visit the plant to address the whole membership to gain acceptance of Branch policy on redundancy. At Daimler, the vehicle builders, had along with other unions

in the CSEU signed a procedure agreement for redundancy in April 1951. It was similar to that of Jaguar. Again the Cov BC charged their chief steward with not upholding Branch policy. It was, however, the body shop at Daimler who were arguing that they had never accepted such an agreement. It was craft values rather than seniority over jobs which they were defending. They maintained,

"A very poor tradesman who was also a very poor trade unionist could be kept on while a real first class man in every respect had to go because he had been with a firm a few months less time than the other". 181

On the 15 October the Cov BC exonerated the role of their chief steward. If found that, however,

- "1 The body shop was wrong in not carrying out advice given by Branch Committee.
- 2 That the Branch Committee instructs our members at Daimler Co to set up a NUVB committee consisting of stewards from all shops. When this is done the body shop be again informed of redundancy procedure. If they do not agree to it we must again look into the question". 182

Sectional interests within unions did not remove divisions between unions. At Morris Motors in Oxford it was the TGWU, who though accepting the principle of a joint union committee, were also seeking to retain the right to act independently of joint authority. A T Penn and NUVB Do reported in July 1951,

"Several joint meetings have been held at Morris, Oxford, on the new proposals of a working agreement for shop stewards. The craft organisations have reached agreement, but we cannot get the officials of the TGWU to agree. They want to be a joint movement but claim the right to function as a separate organisation on any question". 183

It was during the final quarter of 1951, in a period of growing job insecurity, that there developed two inter plant combine committees which undertook the task of establishing unity between workplace

organisations in the motor industry. In both committees it was a common approach, from within a left wing workplace leadership, which sought to overcome the failure of the union leadership to formulate a policy of opposition to redundancy.

In October 1951, the Conservative administration won a general election. The Chancellor of the Exchequer, R A Butler, introduced a series of policy measures which did little to restore job security in the motor industry. Bank rate increased during November, while stiffer hire purchase terms, along with directives to the banks, in February, placed restrictions upon personal loans and credit. These moves, designed to reduce liquidity in the money markets, were part of the new Governments programme for increased expenditure on arms. This priority towards military expenditure, at the beginning of 1952, accompanied reductions in quotas for the manufacture of cars. As a result, mass short time working and redundancy spread throughout the motor industry. In November, the announcement that the Nuffield organisation was to merge with Austin, to form the British Motor Corporation, raised fears of rationalisation. Government Economic policy, in conjunction with industrial re-organisation across the British owned sector of the federated motor industry, had significant implications not just for employment, but also for the development of workplace organisation. It was out of the conditions of widespread job insecurity that two interplant combine committees arose in the motor industry. Both these committees, whose leading figures were closely associated with membership of the Communist Party, sought to not only unify the leadership of workplace organisation, but also to provide an organisational framework for overcoming sectionalism in the workplace and divisions between the unions. During the course of 1952-3, it became apparent that the development of a uniform workplace policy required more than an agreement to set up a combine committee. Though the establishment of combine committees, both across the motor industry and within BMC

did not immediately capture the imagination of the shop floor, they certainly encouraged a more confident and assertive workplace leadership. The discretionary rights being exercised by management over redundancy decisions could not be overcome through the formation of joint committees. Workplace organisation not only struggled to confront the power of management, it also came to recognise that the independent actions of the shop floor and workplace unity were not always identical activities. Sectional interests frequently appeared to undermine the pursuit of a central policy. It was, however, the political character of the workplace leadership, which sought to unify the shop steward organisations, that became open to challenge by both management and certain trade union officials, during a period when the power of workplace organisation appeared to be on the advance. It was the issue of redundancy which provided both the inspiration for inter-plant committees but which also became the major focus for conflict between workplace organisation and management.

On the 26 November 1951, the Austin works committee met to hear a report on the steel crisis, and to discuss the Nuffield-Austin merger. The minute records that,

"After discussion members expressed opinions that it was necessary that the two shop stewards committees set up liaison with each other. It was recommended to the full body of shop stewards that the secretary write to the Nuffield Shop Stewards to discuss joint consultation".¹⁸⁴

The initiative had in fact already been taken. On the day the merger was announced Dick Etheridge met Les Gurl, the Secretary of the Nuffield Combine Committee at an arranged meeting place, a railway bridge half way between Birmingham and Oxford. They had both agreed that a common association should be formed. On 17

December, the Austin JSSC heard a report from a factory delegation, which had met members of Parliament to discuss the affects of the steel shortage. The meeting went to discuss an invitation to set up a combine committee to cover the workplace organisations in the industry. The minutes record,

"Agreed to set up a committee of all shop steward organisations in the motor industry for the purpose of co-ordinating. Affiliation fee being £1 per year".¹⁸⁵

In a period of two months when job security became the central question for the workforce in the motor industry, the Austin JSSC had agreed to establish organisational links with two workplace organisations; the Nuffield organisation and the Motor Shop Stewards Committee (MSSC). The first meeting of these combine committees in February 1952, took place amid growing concern over the question of redundancy. From the beginning of the year motor manufacturers began laying off workers. At Morris Motors, in Oxford 1,300 were put on short time. In Coventry over 5,000 of the City's car workers were on a short week. The Rootes Group, on the 4 February, issued 900 redundancy notices in their Coventry plants, Ryton and Stoke. Morris engines in the same week announced the discharge of 114 production workers. This was followed by 300 job losses at Singer, 450 from Fisher Ludlow, and the preparing of 250 notices at Standard¹⁸⁶. The inaugural meeting between the Nuffield and Austin shop stewards took place at Transport House, in Birmingham, on Saturday, 2 February. Though the immensity of redundancy and the fear of rationalisation within BMC gave added importance to the establishment of a joint committee, the main business which preoccupied the delegates were matters of organisation. The meeting agreed a name; The British Motor Corporation Joint Shop Stewards Committee (BMC JSSC). It wrote a constitution, outlined a set of objectives, and an agreed

standing orders. Under the constitution an equal division of voting power would exist between both organisations. The total voting power would comprise two factory delegates nominated by the workplace organisation in each of the Nuffield factories affiliated to the combine committee and an equivalent number of votes allocated to the Austin delegation. The chairman and secretary would be elected annually, though both were eligible for re-election. They were to attend meetings as ex-officio members, the chairman having the power of the casting vote. A Steering Committee was set up, comprising of two members from each of the main BMC locations - Birmingham, Oxford, and Coventry. The combine would meet on a bi-monthly basis and rotate between the three centres. All stewards in the corporation were encouraged to attend the meetings, but only the delegation possessed the power to vote. At the first meeting, Etheridge suggested that the Austin works committee would form the Longbridge delegation.¹⁸⁷

Though the objectives centred upon providing an organisational expression for creating a unity between the shop stewards and the memberships of the different unions in BMC, in seeking to strengthen union membership the committee went out of its way to avoid possible allegations, that the combine possessed political objectives. Its status as an a-political organisation was formally written into its constitutional objectives.

"Objectives of this Committee

- A To promote friendly relations between the shop stewards and members of the various trade unions operating throughout the Corporation.
- B To safeguard, maintain and if possible improve wages and conditions of its members.
- C To exchange and impart information in furtherance of Clause (B),

- D To maintain and improve where possible the trade union membership in the respective factories.
- E The functions of the Committee to be strictly non-political and the committee should not be used for the furtherance of political objectives, but confine itself to the domestic interests of its members within the factories represented by the Committee".¹⁸⁸

The combine, though accepting the pursuit of workplace unity, based upon the "domestic interests of its members", was seeking to avoid a political sectarian organisation, but it was equally seeking to avoid the experiences of political motives which had been repeatedly raised against the Austin workplace organisation throughout the Pegg and Bills strike.

During this early period, the ex-officio positions were held by the Nuffield Organisation. Alf Franklin, as Chairman, and Les Gurl, the Secretary, both from Morris Cars, in Oxford, were returned unopposed. Franklin was AEU convenor as well as the Branch Secretary of the City's largest AEU branch. He remained chairman of the combine until 1954 when he resigned all union posts to stand for the AEU DS. Though he was defeated, the disagreements within the AEU over his nomination, led him to believe that his own union would not support him if management chose to dismiss him. He did not seek re-election as a Cowley steward, and consequently took no further part in the combine committee.¹⁸⁹ Gurl, on the other hand remained secretary until the 14 June 1978. Though Gurl and Franklin provided considerable continuity and stability during this early period, from the beginning the BMC JSSC remained dominated by AEU convenors and senior stewards. Even the Longbridge delegation remained predominantly AEU. In January 1953, for example, 19 of the delegates with voting rights were from the AEU. There was only one representative from the TGWU, plus one senior steward from

the SMW.¹⁹⁰ Though McHugh had been party to the initial negotiations, he had been unable to establish a combine of NUVB stewards in BMC.¹⁹¹ Both McHugh and his union appeared to have played little part in the combine after the first meeting. Longbridge was the power base of the vehicle builders. In the Nuffield organisation their workplace organisation either retained its independence for joint committees, like Morris Bodies in Coventry, or, as in the Oxford area, the body and trim were largely dominated by the TGWU. The TGWU on the other hand, though it was the fastest growing union membership across the whole of the BMC, tended to have a lower ratio of stewards to membership, and, as at Longbridge, showed less enthusiasm for joint committees, or in the case of Oxford was often in antagonism with the AEU whose early recruitment practices had been hostile to the semi skilled worker.

Furthermore, the Oxford TGWU Branch was exclusively based upon the semi skilled car worker. The local officials, consequently, were able to acquire not just an intimate knowledge of activities in the workplace, but were able to devote most of their time to the industry. That the TGWU was not party to a joint committee at Morris Motors, reinforced ties with the union branch and the local full time officials rather than with the workplace organisation. At Longbridge, on the other hand, though the local officials had responsibilities for a mass of diverse engineering establishments it was principally the AEU rather than the TGWU which possessed a commitment to workplace organisation. The early combine committee, consequently designed to overcome such divisions, was from the beginning also a product of sectionalism and inter union rivalry both within the workplace and between union organisations. During its first year, though it comprised of five plants in the Nuffield organisation -

Metal Products, S U Carburettors, Tractor and Transmissions, Morris Motors and Morris Engines - plus Austin, it was mainly an organisational unity forged upon an AEU workplace leadership. During the first month of the combine's existence, however, the motor industry appeared on the brink of mass redundancies. It was the newly formed MSSC, meeting for the first time in Coventry, which elected a Main Committee comprising of leading convenors across the motor industry, rather than the BMC combine which sought to develop both a political critique of the crisis in the industry and a policy of workplace resistance to redundancy, to overcome the failure of the union leadership to defend job security. The first meeting of this body was held at the Labour Party offices at Coundan Road, in Coventry, on the 9 February, three days after over 1,000 of the City's workforce had received redundancy notices. Stewards delegations representing 21 plants in the motor industry were in attendance.¹⁹² This included Crossley Motors and Duples, who had both been in conflict over redundancy. In addition to Austin, the meeting attracted delegations from Morris Motors, and both the Morris body and Engine plants, from within the BMC combine.

The crisis of employment in Coventry merely illustrated the failure of trade union organisation to effectively respond. Union response was divided. In the Rootes redundancy, 120 vehicle builders refused to accept the redundancy of 16 of their colleagues in the paint shop.¹⁹³ Their 4 day strike typically in isolation and supported by the Coventry Branch, laid off 1,500 other assembly workers. This action in defence of their own membership at the Ryton plant contrasted with the reaction of the AEU membership in the Stoke Engine plant. Here, the day workers objected to the proposals for short time working, to avoid redundancies.¹⁹⁴ The AEU DC then called a special meeting

of all 28 of its Coventry convenors to discuss the redundancy crisis. On the 10 February, this meeting could only agree on the cause of the redundancy - government policy. It could not agree on how to resist it.¹⁹⁵ The Cov CSEU officials who had been able at Carbodies and Jaguar, to sign local agreements designed to overcome workplace victimisation responded to large scale redundancy by calling a mass meeting of all the Citys stewards to hear an address by the 3 Labour Party MP's. This meeting of the 23 February, and attended by over 500 shop stewards invited the MOS. He did not turn up. After hearing speeches and factory reports from the floor, many of which urged resistance in the workplace,¹⁹⁶ the meeting passed a lengthy composite resolution condemning Government policy and agreeing to set up a Joint Conference between the Birmingham and Coventry CSEU DC's and Midland MP's.

On the day following this steward meeting, Bill Warman, the chairman of the Standard JSSC, circulated a letter to all shop steward organisations affiliated to the MSSC. It invited them to attend a Conference in Coventry on the 1 March. Part of the letter stated,

"The Shop stewards conference in Coventry on the 23 February has made it quite clear that if we are to get any effective action quickly on the question of redundancy it will have to be led by the shop stewards unofficially".¹⁹⁷

He went on to outline a workplace position in relation to union officials,

"This does not necessarily mean that our officials are against such a demonstration, on the contrary, many of them are prepared to give their personal backing as long as their organisations are not committed. It is one of the penalties we must pay while we have so many different organisations, covering the industry, but we cannot wait for amalgamations the attack on the working class standards are here and now and we must have courage to take the only immediate method open to us".¹⁹⁸

Though the question of jobs was directly related to Government policy, the defence of jobs, it was being maintained, could not be guaranteed by the actions of national trade union leaders. Owing to inter union differences, it was upon common policies in the workplace that resistance to redundancy would have to begin. The MSSC was organised through four areas, where the motor industry was located.

Each affiliated workplace organisation in the Coventry, Birmingham, Oxford and London areas would elect their own delegate to their area committee. The area committee would in turn each elect one representative for the area onto the main committee. Provision was made, however, for the right of representation on the Main Committee for any car plant sited outside the jurisdiction of one of the area committees. The scope of the motor stewards combine, though adopting the area influence in the BMC combine, sought to organise the whole of the workplace organisation in the car industry. Beyond representations for the BMC group, it included Pressed Steel from Oxford, the Ford and two Briggs plants at Dagenham, in addition to a subsidiary at Doncaster. In addition there were the Standard, Rover, Humber, and Singer plants, as well as the body building and components manufacturers like Fisher Ludlow, Dunlop, Ones, Meadows, plus firms who had been the centre of redundancy struggles, Duples and Carbodies.¹⁹⁹

The motor stewards combine possessed a far less elaborate set of objectives. Its statement of principle remained one of unity among the unions within the industry. The first conference stated,

"The main object to be the regular discussion of common problems of the industry to ensure the unity of purpose in all unions on motor industry problems".²⁰⁰

Its first elected main committee excluded any BML representatives. It was Peter Nicholas (Rover), Les Buck, (Duplex), T O'Keefe (Fords) Eddie McGarry (Standard) and the chairman Bill Warman (Standard) Nicholas and O'Keefe were members of the AEU. Buck and Warman were SMW and McGarry was for the TGWU. All were convenors and leading figures in their workplace organisation. All but McGarry were members of the Communist Party.

The perspective of the MSSC developed from a political as well as an industrial opposition, not just to the issue of redundancy but from what was considered the major cause of the job loss in the industry, the arms economy. In a period when a Conservative Government announced a £1,5000 mill increase in defence expenditure, the left wing steward leadership developed its position out of the British Communist Party programme, "Fight the cuts - Fight for Peace"²⁰¹ which was issued in March 1952. A document which circulated among the committee of the Motor Stewards Combine, and written by Bill Warman, argued that the military programme meant not just job loss for car workers, but posed a threat to the future competitiveness of the whole industry. The document criticised both employers and union leaders for failing to appreciate what it saw as the ultimate consequences for areas like the Midlands. It stated,

"Certain manufacturers and short sighted trade union leaders looked for arms contracts to swell jobs and dividends. Grisly hopes are looking a bit thin now. War for war is suicidal for the Midlands - atomic targets It is not only military suicide in which the arms race is bound to leave the industry ruined for peacetime, but lost markets won't come back in a world dominated by the US. and her stooges in Germany and Japan. German car exports are already overtaking us in European markets.... there are signs that the workers will not accept the path charted for them and their industry by the Yanks. But to win motor workers need growing understanding of the forces and policy opposed to them".²⁰²

Accordingly, defence of jobs could not be just an industrial struggle against redundancy, rather industrial opposition itself would have to rise out of a political understanding of the cause of job loss. The document concluded by setting out a view of "the way forward".

- "1 Workers to refuse to bear arms burdens. Defend living standards and jobs. Absolute unity and solidarity against sackings.
- 2 Mass action to defend our industry. The whole trade union and labour movement to be drawn into a campaign to demand supplies for a vital peace time industry.
- 3 War means ruin - but peace possible. Fight for a peace pact between the great powers, open the door to normal trade and security". 203

The Motor Shop Stewards contribution towards this programme was to endorse resolution supporting opposition to redundancy in the workplace and to arrange a demonstration and lobby of Parliament on the 13 March. At Duples, where Buck was chairman of the JSSC, a 1,000 workers were reported to have finished work at 4pm to attend a factory gate meeting at which Buck was the main speaker, before going to Parliament.²⁰⁴ Across in Dagenham 2,500 at the Briggs Body Plant attended lunch time meetings, and later boarded coaches for Westminster.²⁰⁵ Smaller delegations left for the West Midlands. This was the first indication that a combine leadership could commend workplace support for factory stoppages and demonstrations across plants. Demonstrations aside, however, a unity through combine policies of a left wing leadership would always ultimately, if policies were to have affect, have to be realised through actions in the workplace. At Austin, redundancy, and the growing power of shop floor organisation towards the final quarter of 1952 resulted in a major confrontation between workplace organisation and managerial power. Once again, the issue of redundancy proved to be a central cause of power conflict, through which management sought to exercise

its discretion over employment to challenge the growing influence of the workplace leadership by attempting to discredit the politics of that leadership. The BMC combine appeared to the management to confirm a growth in workplace power.

At Austin, throughout 1952 the control by management over redundancy could not be separated from the challenge by the workplace organisation. Despite the understanding given by management after the Pegg and Bills dispute over re-employment, preference to ex Austin employees, and the suggestion of consultation with the union officials, the works management frequently sought to demonstrate that it possessed discretion over the interpretation of these undertakings. On the 14 January, for example, the works committee which had met to hear a report of the BMC combine meeting were informed by the convenor, that management at Longbridge had declared a redundancy. They had offered all but 4 workers on the redundancy list alternative work, but had excluded from the list altogether, workers on a different section but within the same department, who had only recently been employed at the works.²⁰⁶ On the West Works, in the Press Shop, 7 out of 10 AEU members were reprieved from a redundancy but the remaining three workers were put on the guaranteed week, and eventually discharged.²⁰⁷ It was during this period of involvement with inter plant committees, that the Austin works committee began to adopt a much bolder attitude towards the anomalies in managerial decision making where redundancy selection was concerned.

On the 6 March, within a week of attendance at the Motor Stewards Conference the Austin management declared 38 workers redundant in the finishing shop. No consultation with officials took place. The convenor called in the 3 full time officials whose membership

was involved, to both address the workforce then approach the works management. An informal meeting was arranged at which Beard (TGWU), Evans (NUVB) and Summers (AEU) were to take part. The senior stewards from all three of these unions, which included McHugh (NUVB), Varnom (AEU) and Etheridge, the convenor, insisted on being present at the meeting. The employers' association representations made a strong objection, but allowed the meeting to proceed. The meeting had to be reconvened on the following Monday. Again the stewards insisted on being present. The management refused to begin the meeting, and threatened to call a works conference over it. The officials withdrew and left the factory.²⁰⁸ The works committee, however, decided to summon a meeting of all the Longbridge stewards and turned the issue into a straight question of workplace recognition in redundancy decisions. On the 11 March, the meeting of all stewards agreed,

- "1 That all shop stewards report the full facts back to their members.
- 2 That we recommend to all members that they refuse to accept any new labour on their respective sections and departments until all redundant labour has been absorbed.
- 3 That we request an early meeting with the CSEU for the purpose of what action we desire to be taken in the matter".²⁰⁹

It was the workplace organisation which was forcing the issue of recognition for both the stewards and the membership, while introducing sanctions. On the 19 March, a resolution went before the CSEU DC,

"That this body of shop stewards requests the CSEU to apply for a works conference for the purpose of establishing the rights of shop stewards to be in attendance at informal conferences, further that the CSEU shop stewards be in attendance at works conferences, also that no new labour be started while employees are being declared redundant".²¹⁰

The local full time officials only agreed to "continue" the matter. The works committee, however, had the endorsement of the Longbridge stewards for seeking recognition of their joint committee, and their senior stewards.

By the middle of 1952, the Austin works committee appeared rejuvenated by the organisational progress in the BMC combine, and through their contacts with Motor Stewards Combine. But as they seemed to have recovered from the Pegg and Bills setback, redundancies re-appeared. In the middle of July the works management began to run down the production of the A90, due to falling orders. A redundancy of 43 body builders was announced at the Kings Norton section of the works. The list included McHugh, the chief NUVB steward, and former secretary of the works committee. Management, however, agreed to re-deployment. All 43, including McHugh, were transferred, on the 16 July.²¹¹ At the same time 58 sheet metal workers were given redundancy notices in the West works. The convenor, when challenged by at a meeting of the JSSC on why no action had been taken, informed the stewards that no report for his involvement had come from the sheet metal stewards.²¹² The metal workers had decided to act alone, disregarding the workplace leadership. This tendency towards sectionalism was not confined to the workplace. During the remaining part of the year the dismissal of a senior steward became the centre of a conflict between the vehicle builders and the Austin management. The redundancy of McHugh became a major confrontation between union and management, which completely split the JSSC at Longbridge.

The Austin works management envisaging a large scale redundancy, and fearing a possible strike, decided to consult with the CSEU local officials. They held an informal meeting in the works on the

14 August and even allowed five senior stewards to attend, including McHugh and Etheridge.²¹³ The General Works Manager, J R Edwards, said all production on the A90 would stop. There would be 250 direct redundancies arising from this, but also a number of pockets of redundancy across the works. In total 800, of which 700 would be manual workers, would lose their jobs. All those working on the A90 would be dismissed section by section, while the remaining pockets of redundancy would be done on a 'last in - first out' basis. By Christmas the new Austin Seven would be in production, employment would then pick up. The first notices would go out the next day, but the majority would be placed over the following 3-4 weeks. Confronted with the union reaction, the management again stated that preference would be given to ex-Austin employees in future recruitment, that the personnel department would in the meantime stop all recruitment of new labour. The MOL would be brought into assist those losing their jobs, and during the period of notice there were possibilities for transfer and re-deployment in the works. As a procedure for handling redundancy, this went beyond any previous approach undertaken by the Austin management. The management, however, would not agree to an overtime ban across the works. On the 25 August, the works committee called for a ban on overtime.²¹⁴ On the 30 August, they summoned a special meeting of the BMC combine committee to get their support and to try and spread the ban throughout the Corporation.²¹⁵ In Longbridge, however, some sections refused to implement it.²¹⁶ Across the combine the response was more patchy.

Meanwhile, the redundancy process was underway. On the 15 August, the first 71 workers on the A90 line were given notice. This included two stewards. Davis of the NUVB and Jones from the SMW.²¹⁷ By the

4 September some 430 had been discharged and 130 were either re-engaged or transferred. On the 5 September only 32 workers were left on the A90 line. These included 3 stewards, Hart and Flynn of the SMW, and McHugh from the NUVB, their senior steward and president of the Bromsgrove Branch. The management declared all 32 redundant, and unlike all the previous 768 redundancies, this group was not given a weeks notice, so as to be available for re-deployment. They were all given payment in lieu of notice. The day the McHugh redundancy was announced, Geo. Evans, the NUVB Do, happened to be at Longbridge, he immediately went to see the works manager and suggested McHugh should be offered one of the two Body jobs vacant in the Partridge building. The management refused claiming this was paramount to preferential treatment. The management which did not recognise senior stewards claimed McHugh was like any other redundant worker. He should apply for re-employment.²¹⁸ The two jobs in the Partridge building, though traditionally NUVB work, went to two woodcutting machinists.²¹⁹ Four days later Evans called a mass meeting of all the NUVB membership, for 2pm on the 9 September. The employers immediately protested to the stopping of work to hold a meeting. Halliwell, the General Secretary, was informed by telephone by the EEF, and asked to stop it.²²⁰ He was informed by Evans that it was too late to stop the meeting. The vehicle builders clocked out. Evans maintained that due to the shift system, and the distances which his members travelled to work, there was no other time but during working hours to hold the meeting.

Evans was reported to have said to the membership that the dismissal of McHugh was victimisation. He was quoted,

"I am prepared to ask for preferential treatment for shop stewards because their duties place them in a very awkward situation. Anything they have done for their trade union is a bar to their future employment".²²¹

At no point prior to this event is it entirely certain whether McHugh would have been eventually offered some kind of job. After the walk-out of the membership at the instigation of the local official, it was clear in management circles that he would not be employed again by Austin. After the meeting, Edwards, the works manager, issued an instruction to the personnel that McHugh was not to be re-engaged without reference to him.²²²

Right from the very announcement of McHugh's redundancy, it was the NUVB local officials, principally Evans, rather than the Austin workplace organisation, which took control of the dispute over the dismissal of a leading figure on the works committee. Between the 22 September and the 17 February, with the exception of one other unconstitutional stoppage by vehicle builders to hold a mass meeting called by their local officials, the union exhaustively sought reinstatement by putting their case in Procedure. In their three cases put to Central Conference, however, though this gave the full time union officials control over the handling of the case, it effectively neutralised any response in the workplace. The issue became, McHugh the chief steward of the NUVB, rather than, McHugh a member of the works committee. For four months in Procedure the dismissal became subjudice. The works committee were left on the sidelines, while the Combine Committee, lacking the active involvement of the NUVB, and the vehicle builders themselves, not as well organised in other parts of the Corporation, were left merely voicing moral support. Such divisions, however, were not apparent on the management side. The BW EEA, and the Austin management, saw

themselves pioneering a major assault on the growing power of workplace organisation, which they associated with a growing influence of Communist Party membership, among the shop steward leadership. In the period since 1951, 12 unofficial disputes had been recorded in the motor industry. The Austin management associated this development with Communist influence.²²³

It was on the 22 September that a Works Conference was held,

"To enquire into the circumstances surrounding the dismissal of Mr J McHugh on 5 September 1952, with a view to securing his reinstatement".²²⁴

At the conference the management side maintained that there was no suggestion of "misconduct" or "bad workmanship" involved in McHugh's redundancy. In what was described as a "tense" and "hostile" conference, the union side claimed that McHugh's redundancy was for reasons other than the non availability of work. His transfer in July left him "tied around a redundant job". His dismissal was left until the very end of the 3 week of redundancies. Both NUVB officials in attendance, Evans and Morris, a member of the Executive, were former employees at Austin, and both had been dismissed for what they considered their trade union activities. Evans summarising the attitude of the Austin management towards shop stewards claimed, in conference,

"If you were to take a cross section of the people who still work at the Austin company and you ask the first fellow who came out of the gate what would happen to a shop steward eventually, he would tell you quite definitely that the firm would get him sooner or later, and he would lose his job".²²⁵

The management case was that there was nothing unusual about the method by which McHugh had been declared redundant, and that he could apply for employment at Austin in the future. On the 1

October, however, the Secretary of the employers association wrote to the Federation calling for a tough line to be taken against the NUVB on this issue.

"The Federation are, I know, well aware of the of Mr Evans, but the time has come when we can no longer endure such deliberate flouting of our National agreements. Mr Evans sticks to agreements when it suits him and breaks them when it suits him. At the last meeting of our management board I made a full report of the case. It was the general opinion of the Board that drastic action of some sort was called for".²²⁶

From an early date the Midlands association seemed firmly behind a showdown. They were wanting the Federation to pressurise Halliwell into disciplining his local official, and had even contemplated taking their own case against the NUVB, over the stoppage to hold a workplace meeting, through Procedure.

On the 10 October, the McHugh case was heard at York.²²⁷ The union side maintained that their senior steward at Longbridge, had, during July, been transferred to the A90 line when the management were aware that production would soon stop.

The union rejected McHugh being compared to the majority of redundant workers . George Smith, for the NUVB EC, argued,

"800 people have been mentioned. A very small proportion of these 800 can be measured up to McHugh. His ability as a craftsman can be narrowed down to say 70 or 80 people, which gives a different picture. The majority of those 70 or 80, probably the whole of the remainder, have been placed in alternative employment since McHugh had been given this supposed chance to get alternative employment - a man with 15 years service with the firm".²²⁸

The NUVB abandoned their case on the question of victimisation over selection, and began to concentrate upon the failure of management to undertake their general understanding on the re-engagement of

ex-Austin workers. But as the union restrained its membership and chose to fight the case constitutionally, it did so in isolation of both the workplace organisation, and the unions in the CSEU. Increasingly they began to emphasise McHugh, a member of the NUVB, who was differentiated from other redundant workers, as opposed to his position as chief steward, member of the works committee, and CSEU steward. At the Central Conference, the chairman, sought to avoid a "failure to agree" verdict, as the consequences would be an immediate strike, but resisted pressure from the union for a reference back for settlement in the workplace, as this would appear to put some pressure on the management to settle. It was agreed only to hold the question at Conference while certain evidence regarding the extent of re-employment was established. Having conceded over the issue of victimisation the finding read,

"The employers in Central Conference were satisfied that the dismissal of Mr J McHugh had taken place quite properly in accordance with the normal custom and practice in the company when the redundancy occurred. They were, however, cognisant with the undertaking which had been given by the company to the confederation that with the exception of specialist workers preference would be given to redundant workers when the company were engaging new starts. On an assurance from the Employers that the company had every intention of honouring this undertaking the union representatives agreed that the question should be retained in the hands of the Central Authorities".²²⁹

This Conference disclosed that the redundancy had involved 8 shop stewards; one from the TGWU, two SMW, and five from the NUVB. There had been no complaints over any of these selections.²³⁰ Of the vehicle builders stewards, two had left the union and found other jobs, one went to Fisher Ludlow, and another had been redeployed at Longbridge. The fifth was McHugh. Among the final 32 redundancies, however, only McHugh had not been offered a job interview. Austin, however, were now beginning to recruit production workers for the new Austin Seven.

The Conference decision allowed the Austin management further time. The NUVB, not wishing to inflame the local situation, decided not to raise the issue within the workplace. The onus now lay entirely with the works management. As recruitment of new labour took place, the works management would have little excuse for not re-engaging McHugh. On the 9 January 1953, however, the NUVB were again back at York.²³¹ A further 50 new starts had been made in the body shop, to which the NUVB membership had withheld their objections. But in November, the management placed a requisition with the Solihull labour exchange for more body builders and finishers - McHugh's line of work. The NUVB local officials raised this with the employers association, only to be informed that any outstanding redundant employees must now be considered upon an equal basis with those registered unemployed.²³² A policy of preference for ex-Austin employees, redundant the previous August, had been terminated. Throughout the period, McHugh had never registered unemployed. He had been paid victimisation money by his union.

It is clear that a division of opinion existed between a section of the Federation, the BW EEA and the Austin management, over the Conference findings. In correspondence with the association, Ramsey, the assistant secretary of the Federation, had taken the view that, "all things being equal.... sooner or later McHugh would be engaged".²³³ The firm was beginning to stall the issue by claiming that 270 of the original 700 manual redundancies had not been re-employed. Many of these were likely to have found other jobs, but few unemployed were vehicle builders. At local level the employers association was justly claiming that McHugh could never be taken back, for;

".....reasons which could not be brought before the central conference". 234

On the 14 February, these reasons were presented in a letter to the EEF by the local association secretary. The letter stated,

"The union (NUVB) are openly asking for preferential treatment for McHugh because he was a shop steward. If the company were to give way on this point, a very dangerous precedent would be established. I understand that since the last hearing of this case at central conference, Halliwell requested an interview with Sir Alexander Ramsey (EEF Director). The interview, quite rightly in my opinion, was refused. It would have been wrong for the Director to have discussed the matter either formally or informally. The matter can be re-opened only by the direction of the central conference committee.

On reading the notes I get the impression that Mr Bruce Ramsey (EEF Assistant Secretary) is a little uneasy with regard to this case. I understand that, at any rate at one time, he felt that the company would be wise to re-engage McHugh. On the other hand, in Mr Bruce Ramsey's letter of the 2 February to Mr Hope (BW EEA) he appears to take substantially the same view of the case as I have taken throughout. He says in his letter that 'all other things being equal' the company had given an undertaking to re-engage their redundant employees in preference to taking on new starts. I entirely agree with this and would point out that in the case of McHugh 'all other things' are very far from equal. Therefore the company is under no obligation whatever to re-engage him, nor is the company under any obligation to give their reasons as to why they will not re-engage this man, nor should any pressure be brought to bear by central conference committee or the Federation to induce the company to change their view. On the contrary, central conference and the Federation should give the company all possible support in the stand which the company have taken.

If, after reading the above notes, anyone is in any doubt as to the right line to take in this matter, it is necessary only to consider the repercussions which would result if McHugh were to be re-engaged. McHugh is a Communist and a very troublesome one. He belongs to a union which is Communist controlled - a union which habitually flouts National agreements wherever it suits them to do so. This case has had a great deal of publicity. Any sign of weakness on the employers' side would have disastrous results and could not fail to boost the prestige of this very undesirable union. The repercussions which would result from this would be more far reaching and more harmful in the long run than the action taken by the Company". 235

Three days before the actual start of the strike there appeared to be no second thoughts on the part of the management side in Birmingham. They were maintaining pressure upon the Federation to support their view. On the 19 January, Halliwell had tried to get informal talks with the Federation leadership.²³⁶ On the 26 January, the Longbridge members of the union stopped work to hold a meeting called by Evans. They agreed to support their leadership attempts to gain re-instatement of McHugh.²³⁷ With no response from the management side, the NUVB EC met to give the Birmingham DC the,

"full authority to take action to secure the management undertaking of the 14 August".²³⁸

After 14 days notice, 2,278 vehicle builders began an indefinite strike on the 17 February, for the re-instatement of McHugh. The EC declared the dispute official at its meeting on the 27 February.²³⁹

The dispute placed the works committee in an entirely ambivalent position. McHugh, and the NUVB stewards, had given support to the JSSC in which the AEU had long provided the stability and workplace leadership at Austin. Until 1951 McHugh had been secretary, this position had more recently been taken by George Maran, also from the vehicle builders. The Works Committee, however, had been kept on the sidelines as the union officials spent five months taking the case through Procedure. Strike action by the NUVB would inevitably result in widespread lay-offs affecting the other unions in the works. Thus the workplace leadership found itself in a position of trying to maintain support for McHugh's reinstatement, while maintaining unity within the JSSC, when many stewards and their memberships, were being put out of work. Their situation was not helped by a decision of the CSEU National leaderships to remain neutral.

Management, on the other hand, sought to maximise their own position

by selecting all the AEU stewards for lay-off and, under the threat of lay-off exhorting, the workforce to 'blackleg' on NUVB jobs, following a re-organisation of work. The Works Committee dispute holding regular meetings, became isolated from the daily contact with the workforce. It became increasingly powerless to influence a course of events over which it had considerable sympathy, but which it could not gain the overwhelming support either from the JSSC, or, more importantly, the membership. The progress of the dispute merely reinforced the isolation of the NUVB and eventually led to a move on the part of the TGWU to set up a breakaway JSSC. Both the arguments for a new joint committee and the projection of the issue by management, centred around a criticism of the political views associated with the workplace leadership. It was the affect of this attack upon a confused and divided JSSC which helped to isolate and then eventually inflict a serious defect upon the NUVB, and the Works Committee, in general.

The Works Committee summonsd a special meeting on the first day of the strike. The immediate steps it took were,

- "1 That there should be no 'blacklegging' on jobs involved in the dispute.
- 2 That we reaffirm our support to the NUVB.
- 3 That a press statement be drawn up by the EC of Works Committee for insertion in the local press advising members what to do if laid off through the strike.
- 4 That a full meeting of shop stewards be called for Thursday, 19 February at 12 pm". 240

By the end of the first week of the strike, only the works committee and the 120 strong AEU stewards had held meetings and given clear support to the NUVB.²⁴¹ The JSSC meeting on 19 February, after hearing an address by Etheridge, voted first for the convenor to

approach the works management on the reinstatement of McHugh. The minute states that this produced "an emphatic No"²⁴² from Edwards, the General Manager. The meeting resumed but passed no clear resolution of support. Instead it agreed to set up a liaison committee between the JSSC and the NUVB strike committee. It published a leaflet outlining the case, and applied for the convenor,

"....to have access to the works at all times to carry out his duties".²⁴³

On the Friday, when many of the Longbridge workforce were collecting their last wage packet, Etheridge made repeated statements over a public address system outlining the importance of the issue at stake.²⁴⁴ During the whole of the dispute, policy and discussions were confined to meetings held by the works committee and the JSSC. No mass meeting of the workforce was ever called. The NUVB were the only organisation to hold a regular weekly meeting, at the Digbeth Institute, of its membership. The solid expressions of unity retained within the vehicle builders, contrasted with the fragmentations and divisions emerging within the membership and workplace organisation.

The BW EEA had received a letter from the economic league, on the 20 February, the third day of the strike which claimed,

"The inside story of the Austin strike is that there is not the slightest doubt it is a cleverly concealed Communist attempt to hold up production in this important plant".²⁴⁵

It then went on to identify Etheridge, McHugh, Varnon, and Moran, as being either members of the party or its sympathisers. The only conclusive evidence really related to Etheridge. Not only did he publically state his membership, but actually stood as a party candidate for Northfield during the 1950 General Election. Coverage

of the strike in the press largely centred upon the politics of the workplace leadership. Evans, on the 24 February, issued a strong statement, denying that the dispute was either political or being run by the Communist Party. His statement read,

"The dispute has nothing to do with the Communist Party. It is solely under the control of our union EC which has had the circumstances of the case before it since last August. The strikers had unanimously given their support to the EC". 246

The Works Committee throughout tried to retain support for the issue and preserve unity within the JSSC. At a JSSC meeting held on the 24 February, addressed by Evans, the leadership of the Works Committee took the authority to issue press statements, and agreed that it should be the body to liaise with the NUVB strike committee.²⁴⁷ It was not, however, until the 28 February that the JSSC took a position on the dispute. It did so by firstly rejecting a motion,

"That the EC (of the Works Committee) approach the management and request the re-engagement of Bro McHugh within 2 days, failing this the shop stewards would extend the dispute".²⁴⁸

Instead it passed an amendment which called for the trade unions to orchestrate support,

"That this body of shop stewards are of the opinion that the full weight of the trade unions should be put behind this dispute to bring it to a speedy and satisfactory conclusion". 249

Although this resolution drew attention to the seriousness with which the workplace leadership viewed the dispute, the fact that it was relying upon the union organisations at National leadership, rather than workplace organisation, was itself an indication of the divisions within the JSSC. On the 27 February, the CSEU National officials meeting to discuss the dispute showed no sign of wishing to be directly involved. Instead they agreed that,

"No action to prejudice the position of the NUVB".²⁵⁰

rather than collective action, would be the basis from which they would proceed. In response to the Austin JSSC call for trade union support, the CSEU EC declared,

"..... the dispute is one in which the Confederation has no standing as the matter is being dealt with by the EC of the union with the membership concerned".²⁵¹

The Federation interpreted this as a sign of the failure of the vehicle builders to get support from other unions. The NUVB had become isolated. This isolation of the union within the CSEU, was shortly met by a move on the part of the TGWU to discredit the support in principle which the Works Committee had been able to get agreed in the JSSC. On the 2 March, the local officials of the union called a meeting of all its Longbridge stewards with the intention of withdrawing its stewards from the JSSC. Their meeting issued a statement saying,

"We hope our decision will lead to the formation of a new shop stewards committee that will give a positive lead that will develop trade unionism that will be concerned with wages, hours of work and working conditions".²⁵²

Representing a quarter of the Longbridge unionised membership, this was a clear move on the part of the TGWU local officials to confront the leadership of the Works Committee. James Leask, the area engineering trade group secretary, addressing the unions annual meeting of stewards at Transport House on the 5 March said,

"Many other unions will join us... we hope there will arise from it a new spirit of determination to ensure that industrial grievances are dealt with in a true trade union manner".²⁵³

Even the Birmingham Trade Council appeared hyper-sensitive towards the allegations of political motives, being voiced in the press. In arrangements for a delegate conference of trade unions, all shop stewards, drawn from five Midland Counties, its invitation to discuss redundancy and short time read,

"It will be a non political fact finding conference and we hope that out of the discussion we will get some concrete suggestions for remedies for redundancy and short time working". 254

The McHugh dispute, in the context of the emergence of a workplace organisation, and combine committees with the objective of unifying union memberships and stewards in the workplace, was not merely having to confront the established sectional divisions but an additional political division between workplace leadership and members, as well as workplace organisation and individual unions. The TGWU's local officials were seeking to establish the leadership of a breakaway JSSC, based upon their own increasing membership in the works in conjunction with a number of smaller unions. This realignment would, if successful, have polarised the membership between such a new group and the current position in which the existing leadership returned the strong support of the AEU, NUVB, ETU, and the Foundry Workers union. This intervention on the part of the TGWU reinforced the isolation and independent character of the NUVB and considerably weakened the credibility and authority of the JSSC. On 10 March, the weekly meeting of the vehicle builders which re-stated their intention to continue the strike, resulted in Evans being quoted as saying,

"With or without, the support from the other unions our members at Longbridge are determined to carry on until the management concede our demand". 255

The JSSC widened the divisions among the stewards. On 4 March, it agreed,

"That this JSSC deplore the action of the TGWU in issuing the recent misleading press statement at a period when the members were present at a shop stewards meeting where decisions arrived at received their full support. Furthermore being of the opinion that this action is a repudiation of promises made at National level that no union would take any action that would prejudice the NUVB cause, and we request the Confederation to take steps to discipline them". 256

The meeting concluded by thanking those members of the TGWU for their presence. By the 10 March, such was the growing acrimony that the workplace leadership had to stave off an attempt, from within the JSSC, to refuse admittance to the TGWU stewards. This was defeated by a counter motion which would leave the question to be debated by the full body of stewards after the NUVB dispute was over. The two meetings of the BMC combine committee held during the McHugh dispute did little more than provide "moral and financial" support. At its meeting in Oxford on the 14 March the JSSC heard a report from a delegation of NUVB stewards and then adopted a resolution not dissimilar to that taken by the Longbridge JSSC. It read,

"That this body of shop stewards support the principle for which the NUVB are fighting and call upon Mr Lord (Chairman and Managing Director, BMC) to honour the agreement made by his company on the 14 August 1952. We call for support both morally and financially, and call upon all our members not to blackleg or handle work declared black. Furthermore, we are of the opinion that officials at Confederation level should give their full support and make a statement to this effect". 257

The strength of the combine during this early period lay in its organisation among the leading AEU stewards. Discussion of anomalies, inequities, and variations in prices and conditions between the same sections in different plants were the most positive aspect of its existence.²⁵⁸ As a forum for the exchange of information among the workplace leadership, it provided considerable

insight into the operation of management. Its collective weakness apart from its over dependence in the AEU, was that it lacked authority among the membership in the workplace. The management at Austin acted to diminish further the influence of shop stewards in the workplace during the course of the dispute. The action of the NUVB resulted in 6,750 other workers being laid off. Having included all the AEU stewards, and the majority of the remaining stewards, with the exception of the TGWU, not only were the workplace stewards divorced from the workplace, they were unable to oversee the adherence of decisions taken at JSSC meetings. The workforce without the immediacy of representation were being subjected to the exercise of managerial pressure. On the 10 March, the JSSC heard reports that chargehands and apprentices were 'blacklegging' in the East Works.²⁵⁹ By the 16 March, the convenor had to report that 'blacklegging' was been undertaken by the AEU, in the East Works.

"This matter had been raised with the company who had stated the question of members working on work that had been reorganised was entirely voluntary. The AEU members had been instructed to confine their work to that they normally did".²⁶⁰

But in view of the threat of lay off, it was becoming apparent that the practice was widespread, particularly among the TGWU, the majority of whose stewards were no longer in attendance at JSSC meetings. It had even been reported that 35 NUVB members in the experimental department had not joined the strike.²⁶¹ The increasing weakness of the JSSC in the face of an evaporation of its influence focussed attention upon the activity of the National officials. The meeting on the 16 March, recognising the possible consequences for workplace trade unionism called for official intervention. The resolution put by the AEU membership in the West Press was adapted by the JSSC.

"We the personnel of the West Press view with concern the apparent disinterested attitude of our officials at National level with regard to the Austin dispute. Therefore we request the said officials to make an approach to the Austin management to try and end the deadlock which now exists. Many of our brothers are unemployed and in financial distress and we consider that if officials insist on their no statement attitude they will undermine the confidence in the unions as a whole, and this could cause widespread resignations". 262

The 16 March also produced an announcement by the firm that 500 workers had retired. The implication being that many of those were vehicle builders. This news was accompanied by a further attack upon the NUVB by Leash, of the TGWU. He was quoted as saying,

"The full truth of the strike and subsequent developments have never been told... No doubt it is a severe disappointment for those who want to continue the strike to learn that several hundred men have been invited to resume work tomorrow. Mr Evans is clutching at any excuse to give him the opportunity to claim that the strike has been prolonged. What evidence can he offer that he has tried to settle it?" 263

That the works management had acted to re-engage some of those laid off, was seen as a sign that the impact of the dispute was beginning to decline. Speaking of the decision to re-engage TGWU members Leash went on,

"Our members welcome the opportunity to return to their former jobs. The management is to be complemented on the step it has taken to open the works as it will mean that the distress which has been caused to many families can never be resolved". 264

Pressure was building up after a month of strike and layoff, for some form of intervention. Though the NUVB were in receipt of dispute pay, many of those laid off were ineligible for registering unemployed. During the four week period there had been no informal contact between the NUVB leadership and the Federation. On the 18 March, this leadership began looking for a way out of a dispute

which was having widespread affects on other unions, and which the vehicle builders could possibly lose. Pressure on the NUVB began to be exerted from the CSEU National officials. On the 12 March meeting at York, they suggested that the union call for a court of inquiry.²⁶⁵ The NUVB EC met on the 16 March, decided instead to hand the matter over to the TUC.²⁶⁶ At the weekly meeting of the membership in dispute the NUVB President, General Secretary, and 5 members of the EC appeared at the Digbeth Institute in Birmingham, to put the case for an inquiry. The meeting gave its support to its National officials. It passed a four point course of action.

- "1 To endorse the decision of the EC to call on the TUC to intervene.
- 2 To call on members in other parts of the Country that work contributing to the manufacture of Austin bodies or vehicles to black that work.
- 3 To authorise the EC to urgently press the TGWU to instruct members at Austin not to do work covered by NUVB workers.
- 4 To issue a further appeal to all branches of the NUVB to continue their support to the strike fund".²⁶⁷

The NUVB were to proceed by seeking an inquiry but also by increasing sanctions. The NUVB, however, were not really in a particularly strong position to affect the flow of outside supplies to Longbridge. They were able to get their membership to stop work from Morris Bodies in Coventry, but in Oxford they could not prevent the TGWU continuing to undertake their jobs on the A40 body at Morris Motors. Furthermore, the TGWU rather than the NUVB controlled the semi skilled work at the more important body plant, Pressed Steel. It was therefore, the search for an inquiry rather than an intensification of sanctions which took precedence in the leaderships activities. It soon became evident that the management, unlike the union were

seeking humiliation as the price for victory.

The day the TUC agreed to approach the MOL to discuss the basis for a Court of Inquiry, to which the vehicle builders had stated they would accept the findings, the Austin management issued an ultimatum to the 2,000 remaining workers on strike. The company published the following notice on the 23 March,

"During this strike hardship and inconvenience have been caused thousands who have been thrown out of work in consequence. Surely by now most people realise that nothing can be gained by prolonging the strike, but in case anyone is in any doubt the management states emphatically that it has not the slightest intention of giving way to the strikers and there can be no compromises.

Up to now the factory has been kept fully open and any strikers who wished to do so has been free to resume work at anytime, but obviously these arrangements cannot continue indefinitely. That being so, let it be understood that if a general return to work does not take place during this week any person still on strike on Friday, 27 March will be recorded as having left the company employ".²⁶⁸

This no compromise position was a clear attempt to sustain a managerial unity for enforcing a defeat, not just on the NUVB, but on the influence of the workplace organisation. The move, coming as it did on the day of the TUC announcement to seek intervention, was also in part a means of trying to circumvent the earlier unease within the federation leadership over the company's re-engagement policy. In the workplace, managerial pressure also increased on union members. The convenor reported to the JSSC, on 30 March, that,

".....AEU members working on various tasks were meeting with pressure from shop supervision to do work which was black. Our members had contacted the DS who instructed them to confine themselves to their own particular jobs".²⁶⁹

This managerial pressure began following 1,583 NUVB members who did not return to work. The works management had begun to recognise production. The union's EC failed to persuade the Austin management

to delay the notices to enable a mass meeting of members to occur. The dismissals put the union in a particularly weak position from which to continue their fight. Fifty seven of the vehicle builders, 89 stewards in the BMC Corporation, were from Longbridge. On the 1 April, the EC called a meeting of their remaining 32 stewards in BMC to organise the blacking of supplies to Austin.²⁷⁰ The management announced that the 4,000 workers previously laid off would be re-engaged on the guaranteed 34 hour week. Only 350 of the firms 2,000 vehicle builders had returned despite the general depression in the motor trade.²⁷¹ On the 2 April, the Foundry workers, NC, at a meeting of the 10 principle union leaderships with a membership at Austin called for,

".....the formulation of a positive policy withdrawal of all labour employed at the Austin group to bring the dispute to a successful conclusion".²⁷²

Meanwhile the vehicle builders leafleted Birmingham factories with a message saying,

"A deliberate planned attack upon trade unionism and shop steward organisations which effects every active trade unionist and every worker in the engineering industry is taking place at Birmingham in Austin Motors.... it is not the fate of one man but wages and working conditions of thousands of workers are at stake in this struggle".²⁷³

On the 2 April, the MOL under the Industrial Courts Act of 1919, ordered an official Court of Inquiry to be set up.²⁷⁴ The management refused an offer of a return to work pending the decision of the Court. The Court sat for two weeks. Though the management were criticised for not disclosing their reasons for the non-engagement of McHugh, and for their refusal to delay their ultimatum until the NUVB EC had time to hold a meeting of its membership, the main conclusions went all against the union. It found that McHugh had not been unfairly dismissed, that Evans was seeking preferential

treatment, that the actual strike decision was technically in breach of the unions rule, and that both the company and the NUVB "adopted a regrettably inflexible attitude and neglected reasonable possibilities of compromise".²⁷⁵

The emergence of combine committees in the motor industry had been closely associated with the issue of redundancy, recession, and the election of a Conservative Government possessing a priority towards the expansion of the arms economy at the expense of job security among car workers. The policies advocated by the workplace leadership to resist redundancy, had increasingly encouraged workplace organisation to seek a greater influence in the way redundancy decisions were taken by managements. This progressive involvement of the workplace organisation was seen by the Austin management as an expression of Communist influence in both the combine and workplace leaderships. In a period of recession in the motor trade, in which other Federated employers under the prosperity of arms contracts were accepting national wage increases, the motor employers began to face up to the challenge of workplace power. It became evident that in the showdown over the redundancy of McHugh, it was the employers rather than the unions which retained a unified position to defend their traditional rights over questions of dismissal. Although the combines committees had provided the possibilities for an organisational unification of senior stewards drawn from workplace committees, in the BMC combine such organisational unity did not possess authority over the workplace membership. The most important source of support from within the combine workplace organisations was financial. Standard, Duples, and the BMC Combine firms all provided substantial funds payable to the members of all unions laid off in the dispute.²⁷⁶ In the McHugh dispute, the control over the

issue exercised by the NUVB, not only violated its struggle for the support of both National and local full-time officials, in the workplace the conflict had split the membership from the credibility of the JSSC. The JSSC in turn lost the support of a major union, the TGWU. The Works Committee faced with a break up of its power base was, through the layoff of the mass of stewards unable to influence the daily course of events in the workplace.

Over the McHugh issue, the Austin works management ably assisted by the employers association, were prepared to take an uncompromising stand over the dismissal of a chief steward and member of the works committee, and to demonstrate their authority in the workplace by removing the whole of the works committee for the period of the dispute.

The Court of Inquiry did little to heal the rift between management and workplace. The NUVB membership were given their jobs back, but on managements terms. They were only gradually offered employment. The effect of the dispute upon workplace organisation however, was catastrophic.

On the 22 June, the JSSC were informed that the Austin management had issued a statement saying that under no circumstances would McHugh be offered his job back.²⁷⁷ The meeting heard that no NUVB steward who had been involved in the dispute was in work.²⁷⁸ In July, Evans stated that of the 28 stewards who had served on the NUVB strike committee in the course of the dispute, only 6 had been reinstated, 15 others were still unemployed. A further 9 stewards, not members of the committee, were also not recalled.²⁷⁹ Recrimination was rife. Attendance at the JSSC slumped. During March there were over 75 stewards regularly in attendance, by June it was down to 38.²⁸⁰

The meeting voted to call in the local Confederation officials as a first step in trying to rebuild their joint committee.²⁸¹

PART 8

POST WAR CRISIS AND THE MOTOR INDUSTRY

Abstract

The year 1956 was to see an important turning point, in regard to both the question of redundancy and workplace organisation in the British owned sector of the motor industry. This change was precipitated by a number of events, of which the most important were two redundancy strikes at Standard Motors and BMC. The issue of redundancy and the attitude of workplace organisation began to change, following a new round of increased investment programmes announced by the 'Big Five' manufacturers, who entered into a competitive struggle for the domination of the home market. It was the prospect that such investment would result in the introduction of labour saving devices, which sent the fear of redundancy, because of automation, through the mass assembly plants. In 1955, the leading figures from the combine committees brought the question of 'no redundancy' and the 'right to work', to the centre of workplace relations.

This section begins by outlining the developments in investment plans and the movement in both the product market and the security of employment in the motor industry, from the high point of prosperity in 1955, to the point of severe recession in 1956. In the second part, a close analysis of managerial strategy in Longbridge, following the McHugh incident, seeks to emphasise how the weakness of workplace organisation, following such a defeat, led to a greater dependence upon officialdom. This section analyses the impact of change in the leftward moving TGWU, following the appointment of Jack Jones and Les Kealey, both upon the unity of workplace organisation at Longbridge, and the implications for the resolution of both the Standard and BMC redundancy strikes.

The final sections deal with how the acceptance of redundancy

procedures, based upon the position of covenors and senior stewards, began to change the strategy of works management to workplace organisation. It was, however, the rapid movement towards 100 per cent organisation after 1956, throughout the BMC plants, followed by the increase in the incidence of stoppages on the shop floor, which saw senior managements in the motor industry seeing a decline in the authority of officialdom over the memberships, became divided between seeking the intervention of the State to restrict unofficial activity and, the advice coming from the Motor Industry Joint Council, for the re-establishment of order in the workplace, based around a greater acceptance of the representative functions of senior stewards. Throughout the final section, the vulnerability of workplace leadership to managerial power is stressed. It is maintained that while the combine committee suffered from the limitation imposed by non-recognition of officialdom, its leadership was also vulnerable to suspension and prescription by national union officials. While procedures may enhance the status of senior stewards in workplace industrial relations, their position in an interactive power relationship between the organisation of management and union officialdom, creates considerable pressure to act constitutionally, despite the spontaneous sectional disputes on the shop floor. Their newly acquired strategic position in the power relationships in the workplace, increasingly acts to weaken the basis of their authority over the shop floor.

From the final quarter of 1953 until the beginning of 1956, the British motor industry embarked upon a period of sustained expansion and not inconsiderable prosperity. At the start of 1955 the industry appeared to be poised for an annual output of one million cars. Car production and company profits had shown marked increases following the introduction of economic measures to expand domestic consumption. The affect on the industry's workforce though less marked than the change in production and sales turnover did reduce periods of short time working. In general, the expansion of output was largely met by utilising the existing spare capacity in the industry and through higher levels of productivity, rather than from an increase in the workforce. By the second half of 1954, however, the 'Big Five' manufacturers - BMC, Rootes, Standard, Ford and Vauxhall - began to enter into an intensive struggle for their share of the home market. As firms began to unveil their investment plans and introduce labour saving devices in their assembly plants, the fear of redundancy and unemployment arising out of the application of automation spread throughout the industry's labour force. In the summer of 1955, it was the workplace leadership, through the organisation of the established combine committees, which sought a unified policy to overcome the threat of automation and the prospect of redundancy. In the spring of 1956, just as the influence of the workplace leaderships appeared to be extending, both on the shop floor and across virtually the whole of the industry, the high point of industry prosperity, among the major companies, fell away sharply into a severe domestic recession. As export markets had declined, the increasing over-dependence of the industry upon the protected home market resulted in a profound increase in

short time working and redundancy. The motor industry faced a massive revolt in the workplace over job security, redundancy and automation. In the two most critical disputes during 1956, the non-federated Standard Motor company and the federated BMC, engaged in a major confrontation over the issue of redundancy and workplace power. These challenges were to prove a turning point in managerial approaches towards workplace organisation in the car industry. It was mass conflict in the workplace which paved the way towards a reappraisal of managerial strategy over workplace leadership.

In September 1953, and again in May 1954, Bank Rate was reduced.¹ This was followed in July by the renewal of hire purchase restrictions. The resulting general increase in domestic demand brought immediate improvements in car sales and production. By the middle of 1955 average weekly output from the assembly plants was double what it had been in 1952.² The annual accounts of the 'Big Five' manufacturers all showed significant improvements in trading profit in the period up to 1955. Among the British owned companies, BMC profits had risen by 60 per cent, to £23.7 million, in three years to 1955.³ During a similar period, the medium sized Standards' return of trading profit of £5.8 million was 87 per cent above the comparable 1953 figure.⁴ Rootes, on the other hand, had a profit increase amounting to 12.8 per cent for a four year period to 1955.⁵

In the British domestic market, despite the general increase in profitability of all the main companies, it was the American subsidiaries which were making the greatest gains. In terms of profits, Ford, with a return of £21.3 million in 1955, was 82 per cent above that reached for 1952, while Vauxhall, in a period of three years, had in its annual accounts for 1955 shown a trading profit

of £6 million, which represented a 275.7 per cent improvement.⁶

Perhaps of most concern was the changing balance of market share between the US and UK corporations. Although the home market saw an increase in the hold of the 'Big Five' manufacturers, rising from 90.8 per cent of the market in 1947 to 96 per cent for the 'Big Five' by 1954, the market share of the British owned industry fell from 64.2 per cent to 60 per cent.⁷ During this same period, the two American firms increased their proportion of the market from 26.6 per cent to 36 per cent, in the seven year period to 1954.

With the prospect of high profits arising from a growth in the domestic market, but an awareness of increased market competition among the 'Big Five,' the large firms entered into an investment race to expand both productivity and productive capacity in the second half of 1954. Ford announced the allocation of £65 million for a new investment programme. Vauxhall stated plans for a £36 million expansion scheme, while BMC was reported as investing £9 millions into expanding Austin, Morris Motors and Fisher Ludlow. BMC claimed to expect a 65 per cent increase in car output from within the group in a period of 18 months. Standard, on the other hand, issued a statement that over £4 million would be invested into the installation of the most recent automatic equipment for their Coventry plants. Even Rootes were reported to be doubling their investment plans from £4 million to £10 millions, much of this, however, would go into overseas operations.⁸ These investment programmes, embarked upon towards the end of 1954, appeared to be both expressions of the manufacturers optimism regarding future markets, and an acknowledgement among all concerned of the increasing competitive basis upon which the assembly of cars took place.

From early 1955, however, the industry's optimism began to look rather shallow. By 1956, the motor industry was in the middle of

its sharpest post war recession.

In the second half of 1954, nearly 30,000 new cars were being sold through hire purchase agreements, compared with only 14,000 for the same period in 1953.⁹ From January 1955, Bank rate was increased. This was followed in February by a further increase, in addition to restrictions upon hire purchase. By July, the banks were asked to restrict loans. In October, purchase tax rates were increased by 20 per cent, and by February 1956, this had been raised to 50 per cent of total purchase cost. As hire purchase had been a major source for increasing expenditure on new cars, the new high rates produced a rapid fall in both car sales and car production. By the end of 1956, car production had been reduced by 197,000 in a year. The rapid decline in home sales was only exacerbated by the losses in export markets. Between 1954 and 1955, British car exports had fallen by 21 per cent as France, Italy and Germany began to revive their post war motor industries in world markets.¹⁰ In the first two months of 1956, the export of British cars was less than a quarter of the level reached 12 months previous.¹¹ Manufacturers of cars in Britain had increased their dependence upon the domestic market during a period of expansion and stability. Their loss of international markets resulted in the industry, and more particularly its workforce, becoming especially vulnerable in a domestic recession.

Car production in the UK had expanded by 100 per cent between 1952 and 1955, but the corresponding level of employment in the industry rose by only 14.3 per cent.¹² For the workforce, the main benefit during this period of expansion lay less in the number of new jobs but rather in a reduction in the periods of short time working. During 1956, this trend was reversed. The intensity and speed with which the domestic recession hit the industry resulted in wide

spread job insecurity. By the first week of April, 25,000 car workers were unemployed.¹³ A further 38,000 were on short time of which 31,000 were in the Midlands.¹⁴ Among the 'Big Five' manufacturers, all the British sector were on short time, while 40 per cent of the NUVB membership in the industry were reported as not being on a full week.¹⁵ Between April 1956 and the second month of 1957, some 50,000 jobs were lost in the motor industry.¹⁶ In a six month period, 10 major redundancy strikes involving over 52,000 car workers took place. Over 120 days¹⁷ lost production was recorded. The sharpening of competition between the 'Big Five' for the domination of the British market and their subsequent investment in labour saving technology, sent the fear of automation and redundancy across the car plants. The combine committees in the motor industry sought to unite the whole of the workforce on policies to confront both automation and redundancy. Two major confrontations over redundancy arose at Standard and BMC during 1956. In June, the AEU NC voted for a policy of 'No redundancy' and the 'right to work'. At the forefront of this opposition lay the challenge of workplace organisation in the motor industry to the power exercised by works management. By 1956, it was the workplace membership which would play the decisive card. In the intervening period, the growing confidence of an emerging national workplace leadership was not always matched by organisational unity within the individual workplace.

Recrimination, division, and inter union strife continued to characterise the Austin internal workplace organisation at Longbridge for the remainder of 1953. The McHugh redundancy not only divided the workplace organisation, produced a loss in credibility of the JSSC, promoted a fall in union membership, but it also resulted in a tightening up of managerial controls over both workplace representatives and shop floor workers. Though the works management continued to state that their policy towards shop stewards remained as it had been prior to the McHugh dispute, the activities of front line supervision suggested otherwise. The BMC combine committee, however, despite the disarray among the Austin workplace organisation, continued to make progress on a number of fronts. It was, however, during the period when the main car producers began to reinvest, reorganise and intensify competition in the product market, that automation and redundancy became issues which revitalised the activity within the combines. In the absence of a uniform leadership at National level capable of responding both in policy and action to a threat to jobs, it was an attempt to unite the whole of the motor industry membership on a scale previously unprecedented, which appeared to challenge both union leadership and employer. It was mass activity industry-wide by workplace organisation, as opposed to the established dependence upon CSEU DC's or reliance upon the MOL Advisory Council, which appeared to pose a threat to the authority of the unions. The left wing leadership of the MSSC, however, were never able, in the absence of official recognition, to reconcile its attitude towards the confederation.

Though the initial idea for launching two massive conferences of motor industry shop stewards, in 1955, had originated from the Austin

JSSC, the appearance of a powerful mass inter plant movement of workplace representatives was often in contrast to the prevailing realities of the workforce, both in terms of the influence of domestic organisation in the workplace and allegiance of the memberships to workplace organisation. These conferences and the national attention they attracted, not only helped shape the issue of redundancy and automation, but appeared all the more remarkable that they were organised by a five man steering committee drawn from different regions of the industry acting in their own time, outside working hours.

In Birmingham the officials of the NUVB, despite the virtual elimination of their shop stewards, continued to defend their actions over the McHugh dispute. Evans, in July 1953 wrote in the Birmingham Journal,

"Our members on the job were in favour of withholding their labour last September but they were persuaded by the union officials that such action would prejudice their case in the eyes of all constitutionalists".¹⁸

Though procedure had served to reinforce the limited redress in cases of victimisation, ^{the fact} that the union had been out-manoeuvred by a solid approach from the management side was not the end of the retribution over the McHugh case. Evans, in a blunt attack, accepted that his union expected to receive a hostile press but went on,

"But what we did not expect and what caused some surprised heart burning in our ranks was the insidious attack launched within the movement - mainly a campaign of rumourmongering".¹⁹

Beyond the issue of McHugh, the strike of 2,300 vehicle builders resulted in 7,276 members of other unions being unemployed, generating considerable internal division and bitterness. Union membership

fell, vehicle builders were applying to join the metal unions.²⁰ Though financial support for the NUVB at Longbridge totalled £19,000,²¹ much of which was organised through membership of the combines, the defence of McHugh proved costly both for the union, its membership and workplace organisation. A levy on 60,000 of the union's national membership, brought in £1,000 a week. The strike was costing the union nearly £5,000 per week.²² At the height of the dispute, Halliwell, the General Secretary, announced that he would be taking early retirement.²³ Only Etheridge, despite the creation of a liaison committee between the works committee and the NUVB strike committee, had been allowed to attend NUVB meetings where McHugh's case was being discussed.²⁴ In June 1953, the Birmingham labour movement braced itself for an anticipated offensive against workplace organisation, following the sacking of the NUVB steward organisation. On the 11 June, Mr Norman Tiptaft, a former Lord Mayor of Birmingham, speaking at the annual luncheon of the Dudley area of the National union of manufacturers, stated that all those involved in the dispute should be denied skilled employment, or jobs where they were able to exercise a decisive impact on production.²⁵ During July, an investigation among the major Birmingham firms associated with the motor industry by Unit 53, found, however, that there was little cause for alarm among the City's trade unionists, with the single exception of Austin.²⁶ Rover, Dunlop, Lucas, Norton and BSA, in addition to GEC, and Guest Keen and Nettlefolds, the survey reported, showed no marked change in managerial attitudes towards workplace organisation, in the period since the sacking of the NUVB stewards. This was attributed, in the report, to the acquired level of workplace power, rather than the outcome of managerial benevolence or inertia. The report concluded,

"Those who have expected Austin's dismissal of McHugh would be a signal for an attack upon shop stewards were not guilty of over-estimating the desires of the various managements and industrialists but rather of an under-estimation of the strength of trade unions in Birmingham".²⁷

While it may have been the organised power of the unions which inhibited management actions, the disarray within the workplace organisation at Longbridge did appear to present opportunities for front line management to enhance their position of power over the labour force. Unit 53 reported one Austin worker as saying

".....in general there is that extra keenness on the part of foremen and superintendents all over the works".²⁸

This 'keenness' was expressed in the body shop on the 18 June, when the customary ten minute tea break was outlawed.²⁹

The works management continued to state that their policy towards workplace organisation remained unchanged. They would still recognise the works convenor but not the works committee or senior stewards. They did not, however, appear to have rescinded their undertakings in regard to transfers, redeployment, or preference for ex-Austin employees for future job vacancies.³⁰ In practice, the proviso that management retained the right of discretion over such arrangements, still remained. During this period of disunity within the workplace organisation, management activity began to affect the functioning of workplace representation. The restoration of workplace organisation had to rely upon the intervention of the local CSEU full time officials.

On the 22 June, with only 38 stewards in attendance, the JSSC meeting heard a statement, issued by the management that McHugh

would never be offered re-employment at Austin.³¹ The meeting were also informed that only two of the NUVB strike committee were in employment, and at Longbridge the remaining NUVB membership were without workplace representation. Furthermore, the Secretary of the works committee had resigned.³² No TGWU stewards were in attendance at the meeting. The question of organisation was the main issue under discussion. The meeting broke up after agreeing,

"That this body of shop stewards welcomes the confederation officials visit to a meeting of the joint shop stewards for the purpose of assisting us to strengthen our organisation".³³

By the 29 June, the works committee had agreed on the wording of the resolution to be forwarded to the CSEU. A meeting among the local full time officials resulted in J Bolas, CSEU DS, writing to the Austin workplace organisation.

"Among the matters discussed was the necessity to get unity among the shop stewards at the firm and it was therefore decided to ask the Birmingham District Committee of the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering unions to call a meeting of all shop stewards for the purpose of electing a shop stewards committee in accordance with the Confederation procedure".³⁴

This meeting of all stewards was held on the 13 July at 'The Hut' in Longbridge, and was chaired by the CSEU DC Secretary.

This meeting of all Austin stewards, revealed the seriousness of the decline in the shop steward organisations present, compared to the meeting of all stewards held in 1951, over the Pegg and Bills redundancy. Of the 88 stewards in attendance, 57 were from the AEU, a fall of nearly a half who had been present at the AEU stewards meeting only two months previous. The TGWU, which with 4,000 members was the second largest union, was represented by just 7 stewards,

while the NUVB, which formerly had the second largest number of stewards, was represented by only one steward.³⁴ It was at the insistence of the full time officials, that the workplace organisation would be reconstituted under the regulations of the CSEU. The meeting followed previous practice and elected a broadly based works committee. This comprised of 2 AEU stewards and one steward each from the Patternmakers, NUVB, Foundry Workers, and the Sheet Metal union. Varnom was again returned as chairman, while Etheridge held the joint positions of Secretary and Works Convenor.³⁵ The major source of weakness was the depleted state of the NUVB and the absence of the majority of TGWU stewards. Under the umbrella of a 'Trade Union Education Committee', a number of TGWU stewards in the North works at Longbridge had formed their own breakaway committee. Though this emerged during the McHugh dispute, the roots of the opposition within the transport union towards the works committee could be traced back to the union's local officials calling a separate meeting of their membership at the time of the Pegg and Bills strike. This breakaway committee did not have recognition of the CSEU DC, but it did mean that the second largest union was withholding both involvement and financial support from the JSSC. Furthermore, the rift with the TGWU possessed at least the acquiescence, if not actual support, of the union's local officials. The Education Committee presented itself to the press as,

"an anti-Communist Organisation".³⁶

This attitude of the TGWU, led in turn to sections of the JSSC refusing to allow the attendance of any transport stewards in CSEU workplace meetings.³⁷

The newly constituted works committee held its first business meeting on Monday, 31 August, and agreed to meet thereafter on the

last Monday of each month at 5.30 pm.³⁸ The JSSC meetings were to be followed on the first Monday of every month, again at 5.30, immediately after the end of the day shift. The intervention of the confederation had helped to regularise the functioning of the Austin workplace organisation. A budget, which included financial support for the Convenor to cover his lost time during workplace representation, was established. In addition, estimates and regular accounting was introduced to cover the daily costs of administration.³⁹ The committee itself, it was accepted, would receive an annual subscription from each union, calculated pro rata according to membership. The largest donation, by the AEU was £30 per annum.⁴⁰ Smaller unions paid at least a minimum subscription of £2 per year.⁴¹ The finances of the new committee would no longer depend upon ad hoc payments from individual unions.

The works management, however, refused to recognise this new committee. It insisted upon preserving its practiced policy of recognising only the convenor. During the final part of 1953, as the new works committee began to plan a revival of membership interest, there appeared to be a hardening of managerial attitudes towards shop stewards. In December, the meeting of the JSSC heard accounts of four instances where management had acted to prevent the freedom of movement of the convenor in the works. Two of these cases had been raised through the AEU DS with the works management.⁴²

Difficulties over the exercise of workplace representation was not confined only to the role of the convenor. A series of complaints were voiced by individual stewards. In parts of the works, special permission was required from the superintendent of foremen before stewards were allowed to contact their convenor. This invariably meant that stewards were having to declare the nature of their

business to supervisors before requests to see Etheridge were allowed. Part of the minute for the December meeting read,

"....when shop stewards did go to see the convenor they were immediately pounced upon to see whether they had permission from their foreman to see the convenor, and if they did not they were immediately dismissed from the shop.... the tactless way in which this question was being dealt with had created much ill-feeling between the management and the individual shop stewards".⁴³

The meeting also heard a report delivered by Etheridge, which set out what he saw as the implications of this managerial approach for his own role in the workplace.

It, "....involved shop stewards in much running about and time wasted with superintendents when asking for permission to come and see the convenor. It seemed to be the attitude that the convenor could only be contacted if there was trouble in the department but as everyone is aware the convenor should be contacted in order to prevent trouble and give advice. This has always been the practice in the past".⁴⁴

The convenor was already seeing his position in the workplace as in large part one of preventing 'trouble' and offering 'advice'. Restriction on facilities, despite recognition, would not, in the convenors view resolve issues. This JSSC meeting came only a month after the works committee had set about revitalising membership and workplace organisation. On 9 November, the primary objective of the new workplace organisation was stated as being,

"..... to force the recognition of the shop stewards organisation".⁴⁵

The extension of recognition to the role of senior union stewards, a de facto recognition in other words via a recognition of the works committee, became the first policy objective of the committee constituted under the Confederation. In the meanwhile, the workplace organisation began by attempting to recruit lapsed and

non union workers into unions. In December 1953, the works committee utilised the propaganda arising out of the National engineering pay claim, to hold a series of shop meetings across Longbridge, with the intention of increasing union membership.⁴⁶ In the same month, a one day stoppage called by the CSEU for the 15 per cent claim, though not wholly supported in Austin, was sufficient to prevent cars being produced. In the East works, the works committee estimated that some 75 per cent of the workforce had stopped. This included a number of non union members. Where there was a 100 per cent organisation on sections, support was at its most effective.⁴⁷ Following the dispute stewards began to record increased requests for membership forms. By February 1954, the works committee had embarked upon a more sustained recruiting campaign. Individual stewards attending the JSSC were asked to carry out card inspections and to complete a questionnaire on members and non members. A further move on the part of the committee to encourage interest in the workplace organisation, was its decision to sell copies of the Birmingham Journal in the works. From December 1953 onwards, the Journal produced a regular column on the Longbridge workplace organisation. These included reports of the works committee, JSSC and the BMC combine meetings. Not only did the paper provide an opportunity to counter the hostile press which the Austin workplace had experienced, but it provided a regular focus for discussion, debate and information about management union relations. For most of 1954, the issue of reorganisation, labour transfer, piecework prices and the role of rate fixers, were presented. On the 1 March, the JSSC were again criticising the managements refusal to allow the sheet metal steward to contact the convenor. Both the convenor and the chairman of the works committee were being restricted by management.⁴⁸

By June 1954, though the TGWU still largely existed outside the JSSC, the Journal reported the re-emergence of the NUVB organisation. In a letter published in that month's edition, Bill Nordoff, the newly elected NUVB chief steward, wrote,

"We are again assuming our position inside the factory through the zest of our members. Twenty five stewards have been elected and much can be said for those men - considering their lack of experience in the tasks they are performing. Our ranks have filled considerably and we feel that a word of appreciation should be tendered to the works convenor and stewards to other unions for the way they have worked with us. A new relationship has been established with the management and many of our problems are settled almost as soon as they arise. The word 'unity' has again taken shape for us and it is in this spirit we intend to go forward".⁴⁹

Almost 20 months after the dismissal of McHugh and 14 months since the mass sackings of the NUVB shop stewards, the vehicle builders had rebuilt their workplace organisation to half the representative power it possessed prior to the redundancy of McHugh.

The re-emergence of the Austin workplace organisation after the McHugh issue, did not arise from a unity of union members within the workplace, but had to be brought about largely through the intervention of the CSEU DC. The decline in union membership and divisions between the principal unions, in addition to the loss of NUVB stewards, increased the dependence of the workplace organisation on the confederation. While this had bestowed a legitimacy, under the rules of the CSEU, upon the Austin workplace officials and their organisation, it left the workplace relying, in large measure, on the local officials in their dealings with management. The policy of the Austin management, in refusing to recognise the committee and retaining their previous policy of recognising only the convenor, reinforced the tie between the works committee and the role of the CSEU DC. In the BMC combine, however, where the Austin works

committee held half the actual voting power, it was the absence of recognition, not only from the management but from the confederation unions, which obscured the whole attitude of the combine towards the confederation. For the combine, reliance upon channels to the local CSEU districts served only to delay rather than resolve the more immediate issues which appeared to confront not just the BMC, but the whole of management and wage labour in the motor industry.⁵⁰

Despite the evident divisions at Longbridge and the establishment of the works committee through the CSEU DC, the regular meetings within the BMC combine committee were maintained. Throughout 1954, this committee met regularly and even began to extend its activities. Initially, the issues considered by the combine were mainly associated with re-organisation within the corporation. As the BMC, along with the other four main car producers, began to announce the details of their production and investment plans, based upon the introduction of labour saving machinery, the attention of workplace leaderships again focussed outwards towards inter plant organisations. In the Autumn of 1954, at the instigation of the Austin stewards organisation, the workplace leaderships, across the motor industry, pursued their search for a policy to confront the growing insecurity in the motor industry through mass conferences of stewards. By the end of 1955, it was conferences of stewards rather than union officials which was deciding workplace policy over the issue of redundancy and automation.

In the first half of 1954, the BMC combine committee discussed the disparities in holidays, pensions and the different management policies towards transfers and re-organisation in the different factories in the corporation. Though no individual CSEU DC could

itself raise any of these questions, at corporate level or with works managements other than those in their districts, the combine committee set out to find agreement amongst itself and then push for acceptance of their agreed policy through each of the Birmingham, Coventry, and Oxford DC's. For example, on the 9 January 1954, the BMC combine meeting, held at Transport House in Birmingham, discussed an article, published in the Financial Times four days previously, suggesting that labour were likely to be transferred within the Corporation.⁵¹ The combine agreed that letters should be sent by individual workplace organisations to the secretaries of the relevant DC's, raising the issue with local management in the presence of shop stewards. Similarly, on pension and welfare schemes, the combine pushed for uniformity through official channels. The responses of works managements were often as varied as their policies.⁵² Eventually, over pensions, it was agreed, on the 13 March, that BMC workplace organisation should write a letter to Mr L P Lord, the Chairman and Managing Director of the Corporation.⁵³ On the other hand, anomalies in rates, which could be taken up within the individual establishments, encouraged more departmental contact across the combine. At the April meeting of the BMC JSSC, arrangements were made for the leading stewards from the different toolrooms to meet to exchange wage rates and details of working conditions.⁵⁴ This was followed in September, by a meeting of the BMC Press Shops to which Pressed Steel stewards were invited.⁵⁵ By June, a full list of different toolroom rates had been established. The BMC JSSC, following the Austin workplace organisation, began to submit regular reports for publication in the Journal.

In July, attention began to be turned towards wider issues. The

Austin delegates had, following a JSSC meeting begun to raise questions about the increasing rivalry between the 'Big Five' manufacturers.⁵⁶ By the 11 September, a preliminary meeting was held to discuss the idea of holding a conference of stewards in the main assembly plants. On the 14 December 1954, a meeting was held in Birmingham attended by delegates from Austin, Ford, Morris, Rootes, Rover and Standard, the nucleus of the motor shop stewards committee.⁵⁷ A steering committee was formed, comprising of one delegate from Ford, Rootes Rover and Standard, and three from BMC - a representative from Birmingham, Coventry and Oxford. Only two of these were members of the Communist Party.⁵⁸ Later, a delegate from Briggs was added. It was not until the 8 March 1955 following the statements of investment policies and announcements of automated technology, that the MSSC made its arrangements for a conference of stewards in the motor and ancillary industries, to be held in the Cambridge Restaurant in Birmingham. Under the title 'The M A S S' - Motor and Ancillary Shop Stewards - and the chairmanship of Harry Gilman with Les Gurl as Secretary, this first meeting attracted 185 delegates from over 30 factories in the industry.⁵⁹ All the big firms in the industry were represented. From the assembly plants were Fords, Rover, Austin - Morris, Wolseley, Standard, Rootes and Briggs, while among the component suppliers were Smiths, Fisher Ludlow, BLSP, Shardlows, Pressed Steel and Nuffield Products.⁶⁰ The delegates came from workplaces employing some 200,000 workers.⁶¹ In the specially produced conference report, Gurl and Gilman wrote,

"The majority.... of the National Press gave barely a mention of the proceedings but it must be giving the 200,000 of workers represented a well deserved feeling of self-congratulations to have noted that since the conference these self same press organs have discovered AUTOMATION for the first time, and many are now featuring this subject in many shapes and forms - one year after the committee of the Motor Industry shop stewards had decided on the calling of this conference, to call attention to our members to the growing threat to our future prospects of full employment. A clear case of

WE LEAD WHILE OTHERS ARE CONTENT TO FOLLOW"⁶²

The conference, however, while it raised the issue of automation, was a long way short of finding a clear policy with which to defend the interests of car workers. This was partly because it brought in a number of outside speakers who, in the absence of the experience of workplace organisation, were presenting knowledge and information rather than encouraging the development of policy or strategy.

Dr Sam Lilley, of Birmingham University, gave an address on automation but much of his speech was devoted to examples in the Soviet Union. A solicitor, Mr M Manning, spoke on legal rights of workforces in industrial accidents, while John Baird, Labour M P for Wolverhampton, covered questions of rearmament, anti union legislation, and reasons for the Labour Party losing the previous election.⁶³ Other

contributions debated the position of women in the motor industry, the prospect of anti union legislation and the need to give support to American car workers.⁶⁴ The combination of outside speakers and the wide variety of topics, in addition to the absence of resolutions to the conference for policy debate, left the conference being inconclusive in regard to how workplace organisation should approach the problem of automation. The outside speakers appeared to be deflecting attention away from the direct experiences of the workplace representatives. The six hour conference ended by passing a resolution which had been hastily assembled by the Steering Committee, following discussions with some of the delegations from the large plants. The resolution was read out by the secretary and a vote was taken, without a debate or opportunities for amendments. It read,

"That this Conference of the motor ancillary shop stewards, realising the problems which will arise from the increasing automation in the vehicle industry and the possible developments of peaceful uses of nuclear power, pledged

itself to fight for an improved standard of living for higher basic rates and wages, a shorter working week with no loss of pay, extended holidays with average earnings and the introduction of pension and sick schemes.

We believe it is necessary to cut out any inter-firm competition and we call for the widening of the existing motor shop stewards committee and the development of unity of all unions on the shop floor in every factory".⁶⁵

The motion was carried unanimously. Even without a specific set of policies arising out of the floor of the meeting, the conference was widely experienced as a major success. Its organisational success alone, gave considerable stimulus to the shop stewards movement.

Harry Gilman in his opening address said,

"The trend of modern times has shown us all the need for much closer liaison between rank and file members on the shop floor, and the shop stewards in the workshops throughout the industry, and I am pleased to say over twelve months ago we took the lead when we decided to call this conference".⁶⁶

There could be no denying the foresight which had come from the BMC combine leadership and the considerable effort that went into the organisation of such a massive conference. But having identified automation as a possible crucial issue in job security, the meeting had developed not only no set of policies to control or oppose it, but there was no clear view emerging on what kind of approach such a rank and file organisation would take towards realising its objectives. In other words, there had been no serious debate on the relationship between workplace organisation and national union organisations. Speeches throughout the day, however, repeatedly re-stated the central importance of the position of shop stewards. The only national union official, Les Ambrose (AEU), who spoke in a personal capacity, claimed,

"If we direct the industrial life of this country, we can make this earth a more pleasant place to live in. We are the only people who can accomplish this task".⁶⁷

and from John Baird, the M P,

"....members of Parliament are no longer the spearhead of socialism. Its you - the shop stewards".⁶⁸

and from the correspondent of the Birmingham Journal,

"Most impressive was the vigour, the vitality, the fire and the zip. If this is the mood of the movement - lead on Macduff! We may very well have been witnessing the launching of something that is going to make history".⁶⁹

The Birmingham conference, despite the questions still to be settled over policy and workplace strategy, was, under the organisation of a central committee of leading factory convenors from the major firms in the industry, able to successfully bring together a large part of the rank and file leadership from virtually all sections of the motor industry. Under the direction of the Steering Committee, the conference appeared to be instilling a spirit of rank and file self-confidence and a platform for the creation of a possible industry - wide unity between the various workplace leaderships. This momentum was to be further sustained by the Steering Committee arranging for a further mass conference of delegates to be held at the Cowley Workers Hall, in Oxford, on 24-25 September 1955. In the intervening period, the question of automation became an issue of wider concern. It was no longer an issue confined to the workplace leadership in the motor industry. Automation became a subject for media comment. Consequently, the Oxford conference attracted considerable attention, journalists from a dozen national newspapers were in attendance.⁷⁰ The number of delegations from within the motor industry substantially increased. At Oxford, there were some 320 delegates, compared to

the 180 at Birmingham, drawn from 44 factories which employed over 225,000 workers.⁷¹ In addition, there were delegates from 7 unions and four union branches.⁷² For the first time, a workplace delegation from Vauxhall appeared at a joint industry workplace gathering.* Oxford, like Birmingham, was overwhelmingly a conference of workplace rather than union representatives. In the opening address, Bert Edwards, the London organiser of the NUVB, claimed,

"This movement here today will determine the progress of the working class... you stewards are the only people who know how to fight on the question of automation".⁷³

Reg Birch, the president of the London AEU, and a member of the unions NC, in a speech, warned the conference on the question of leadership,

"Do not wait for Big Names, they would come from the shops. The new unionism must be used to punch home the existing policy".⁷⁴

The question of policy towards union leadership, was clearly an important one. At the Oxford conference, however, the emphasis was largely upon workplace rather than union. While, unlike the Birmingham conference, this September conference was permeated by debate and resolutions, the vital question of union organisation and union officials was largely left in obedience. In all, eight policy resolutions were passed. A constitution, drawn up by a delegate from the Rover works, which had already received the assent of the Steering Committee, at its meeting of the 2 July, was put to conference for approval. It contained six points:

- "1 After every conference the meeting of the 'Big Five' the shop stewards should go back to their shops and give a report to their members
- 2 Executive Committee (ie Steering Committee) to be broadened to include representatives from accessory trade groups.

* The conferences were sometimes referred to as the 'Big Six' after this point.

- 3 No permanent delegates to steering committee or any other committee, but all delegates subject to recall and replacement.
- 4 The Steering Committee of the 'Big Five' plus members from accessory firms, plus a number of delegates from the floor, preferably not members of the 'Big Five', to be at all the Standing Orders Committee Conferences.
- 5 The Steering Committee of the 'Big Five' to function as a body of guidance only at Conferences. Conferences assisted by Standing Orders Committee to decide on policy.
- 6 All agendas for future conferences to be circulated well in advance of the date of the conference. This would enable delegates to discuss resolutions with their sponsors and thus receive mandatory powers from them".⁷⁵

The objective of the constitution appeared to be seeking to strengthen the relationship between conference and the workplace, under the 'guidance' of the steering committee leadership. Stress was being placed upon reporting back to the workplace and prior circulation of conference agenda, enabling possible mandating of workplace delegations. The constitution made no claim to the status of conference resolutions, nor did it mention either trade union officials or trade union organisations.

There was, in other words, no clear account of the relationship between the stewards conference decisions, and the policies of the unions. At the Birmingham and Oxford conferences, this could perhaps partly be explained by the fact that there existed, on the two main issues of contention, automation and redundancy, no agreed policy within the CSEU. But this does not entirely account why, under the guidance of the steering committee no debate or view emerged as to either the status, or the approach, which the stewards leadership should take, for example, in relation to union leaderships, or, the local confederation DC's. Put another way, how were the

motor shop stewards conference policies to be realised? This question was perhaps all the more important given the refusal of the EEF to negotiate with the confederation over the question of redundancy. What this actually meant, in terms of the defense of job security for car workers, was that, through union channels shop floor interests over issues like redundancy and automation were left to the vagaries of CSEU DC's, at local level or the often inconclusive tripartite discussions in the MOS Advisory Council, held between employers, government, and union, representatives at National level.

Part of the explanation, no doubt, lies in the fact that the steering committee itself was largely composed of workplace convenors, or senior stewards drawn from the largest assembly plants in the motor industry. It was the position of these convenors, regardless, though in the case of communist party members, because of their politics, which saw the need for an organised workplace unity to overcome the frequent tendencies towards sectionalism in the workplace. It was, however, these same convenors in their positions as confederation stewards, who provided an important link in the relations between the workplace organisation as a whole and union officialdom. It was they who tried to sustain both co-ordination within workplace organisation and liaison with the local CSEU officials. In the case of Longbridge, not only was it just the convenor who was recognised by management, but it was the confederation officials, in the wake of the McHugh redundancy, who helped to further consolidate the position both of the works committee and through it the position of Etheridge. Indeed it was the majority of CSEU officials in conjunction with the workplace leadership at Austin which had brought about the re-establishment of the works committee

through the constitution of the confederation. It was the union officials commitment to that committee, and their presence thereon after, at the annual elections for the positions on the works committee, as well as the vote for chairman, and secretary and convenor, which not only regularised the workplace organisation but which confirmed confederation status upon the workplace leadership. Furthermore, the appointment of Dick Pedder, of the Patternmakers, as Treasurer, at Longbridge, which followed the agreement over union contributions to the shop steward fund, not only encouraged financial and administrative stability, but financed the activities of the convenor by covering his wage loss when on union business. Despite the criticisms which the leading workplace representatives may have held towards the actions of union officials, this did not, generally speaking, amount to the abandonment of constitutional activity.

The constitution of the 'Motor Shop stewards,' consequently was directed towards strengthening the tie between the workplace membership and the leadership in the workplace, rather than pose an alternative to the role or practice of union leaderships. This would again appear to concur with the experiences at Austin, after McHugh. The confederations intervention at Longbridge to re-establish workplace organisation, stemmed from the decline in union membership and the large loss in the number of stewards. It was to arrest a sharp fall in membership, that confederation and the workplace leadership came together in common cause. As a result, the newly elected works committee came into being to overcome the consequences of, what certainly what the NUVB had saw as the outcomes of the failure on the part of the CSEU to support the struggle over McHugh, rather than from what may have been the cause of the workplace decline; the

activities of union officials. Confederation intervention re-confirmed the position of the left wing leadership, at a time when support for trade unions was actually falling in the works. The election of Dick Etheridge by the decimated Austin JSSC, could therefore not be properly said to be the outcome of mass support in the workplace. Though it is important to appreciate that Dick Etheridge, on a personal level, did actually command a substantial degree of popular support amongst the membership as well as the Longbridge stewards, which is perhaps best illustrated by the fact that the works management never appeared to feel sufficiently confident to dismiss him in the aftermath of McHugh, his, and the works committees position, did owe something to the role of the local union officials.

Not dissimilarly, the BMC combine, in which the Austin works committee held half the voting power and whose suggestions had initiated the calling of the 'Big Five' conferences, not only had direct experience of the problems associated with generalising combine policies, through different districts of trade union authority, but actually continued to seek to realise its policy objectives through such a slow and cumbersome structure. This adherence to constitutionalism, appears to have been contingent to the pursuit of recognition on the part of union officialdom. Writing in the December edition of the 'Journal', Les Gurl in reference to the CSEU said,

"I wish with all my heart that they (National trade union officials) would break with the past and bring our unions up-to-date so that the Joint Shop Stewards Committee (the 'Big Five') could be recognised. Paid officials freely elected by our members and paid by unions would do the work then, instead of a few - the few - very hard workers who were trying to do a good job at the moment in their off-duty hours".⁷⁶

The distinction between the workplace leadership and the union officials was seen in terms of the time allowed to serve the interests

of the membership. Recognition of combines and their leadership, would not only bring about a constitutional legitimacy within the union structures but it would release the enormous administrative burden from the loyal, but overworked shoulders of the steering committee. In the absence of such recognition and short of a radical reform in both union structure and in the attitudes held among the national union leaderships, the role of the rapidly growing shop stewards movement in the car industry often appeared somewhat ambiguous, in relation to union organisation. Criticism and dissatisfaction co-existed with a level of dependence upon officialdom. This ambivalence, became all the more evident once conference began to debate resolutions.

A resolution from Briggs Bodies, to which the proposer, Jack Mitchell, claimed that neither the union or political leaderships represented the rank and file, nevertheless called for conference to,

"....campaign through their respective unions for the NE of the confederation of shipbuilding and engineering unions to set up a special sub-committee to look into the whole question of automation.... that the confederation seeks high level talks with the Government with the view to exerting all possible pressure on the powers - that be - to control automation in the interests of the workers..... and to seek a meeting with MP's representing the constituencies of Birmingham, Oxford, Luton and Dagenham".⁷⁷

From Austin's, a resolution anticipating strong opposition from the employers called for "all JSSC's to campaign to support confederation demands", for a 40 hour week and 3 weeks holiday. Other resolutions, on the other hand, which called for an equal rate for women in the car industry, opposition to the employment of cheap labour, the lifting of East-West trade bans and nationalisation of the motor industry, made no reference to official union organisations.⁷⁸

A resolution from Standard, for example, calling for details of the introduction of automation and the collection and distribution of wage rates by the secretary, was directed at placing the responsibility upon the committee, through the work of the secretary, for raising workplace aspirations.

"The aim of the shop stewards committee, should be to bring up wage rates to the highest level in the Industry. Close contact to be maintained on all these issues".⁷⁹

The most important resolution of the Conference, however, came from Austin's. It was an attempt to produce a comprehensive policy for workplace organisation on the issue of automation. The formulation of the resolution itself at Longbridge, arose directly out of a debate within the JSSC, who had held a special meeting to discuss resolutions for the Oxford Conference. Furthermore, the main part of the resolution originated from the Roto Dip Section of the West Works, which had partly been automated, while the remainder developed out of a public debate through the columns of 'The Journal', between Dick Etheridge and Derek Robinson.⁸⁰ What became known as the 'Seven-Point Plan' was moved in Oxford by Etheridge. The full resolution, supported by the BMC, read,

- "1 Detailed consideration to be given to all aspects of safety of operators on automation systems.
- 2 Full consultations between unions and management prior to the installation of new machines, on working conditions and rates of pay, with a view to obtaining a higher basic rate.
- 3 Commencing with the campaign for a forty-hour week, we shall continue to fight a progressive reduction in hours without any loss of pay, so that our standard of living shall be preserved and improved.
- 4 No sackings. Retaining and retraining of persons displaced by automation to be the managements financial responsibility with no loss in earnings for those concerned.
- 5 An improved apprentice scheme to train technicians of both sexes who will be required in an automation

- 6 Negotiations at all levels between management and unions to get agreement embodying these proposals.
- 7 To ensure that with the lowered cost of production due to the benefits of automation the cost of the article produced to be also lowered, thereby widening the market for same".⁸¹

The argument put to conference was that, in the absence of the confederation having a policy for the introduction of automation, which would protect the interests of workforce affected, the employers would not only be able to take all the profits from improved techniques but workers earnings, safety, and even employment, would be under threat. Automation, with its high capital cost was seen as bringing about a greater monopolisation of the industry into fewer hands. At this level of investment and competition in the industry, the smaller firm would be out of business.⁸² For the motor stewards, the main question remained the control over the introduction of automation rather than opposition to automation. Etheridge in his summing-up speech said,

"We are not opposed to automation but our aim is to reap the benefits of it for the workers..... The confederation has no agreement at the moment with regard to the problems and it is vital that they have one as soon as possible if we are to gain better conditions from automation".⁸³

Without recognition of works committees, and with agreements being made with union officials, the shop stewards movement retained its dependence upon the official organisation. As a Journal Correspondent put it,

"....the most serious task facing the Steering Committee is to regularise its relationship with the confederation. Until this position has been straightened out, delegates will have the feeling that they are beating the air or merely assisting in a talking shop".⁸⁴

Cruel words perhaps, to those who had put so much time and effort into making the conferences such a success, but without a critique of the role of the Confederation, the movements strategy was in danger of becoming a statement of objectives but without a clear view of how to realise them. Les Gurl, in a foreward to the 20 page pamphlet of the conference, 'All in Favour Say Aye!', wrote,

"When I first agreed to take over the arrangements for getting the motor industry shop stewards organised to back one central committee, I must admit that it sounded impossible. Yet we can, I am sure, look back on the last twelve months with some pride at what we have achieved in so short a time. For the first time in the history of the motor industry we can call together representatives from all sections : we can discuss our difficulties and help each other in the struggle for better conditions. This is a great step forward towards our final goal".⁸⁵

The workplace leadership had been able to unite the workplace organisation across the majority of the industry, in a way in which the inter union divisions existing at national and local level had failed to do. The problem for the central committee was how would this unity become realised in policy and action. Conference policies remained only recommendations, acceptance of which still had to be won at workplace level. Other policies were clearly conditional upon being carried through individual union and confederation policy making machinery.

The conference, in general, appeared strongly weighted in favour of the 'Big Five' delegates. It was not that these organisation held the main positions on the Steering Committee, but they also dominated the policy-making process. Of the 8 resolutions put to conference 5 came from the BMC delegations, 4 of which were from Austin. Of the remaining 3, two were from Briggs, and one other came from Standard.⁸⁶ The omission of Ford is almost entirely explained by many of their stewards being at another union conference. Furthermore,

of the 31 speakers to address the conference, 27 came from just 6 delegations, 9 came from Austin stewards. Only 4 speeches were made by representatives from the components industry.⁸⁷ Though the conference was still an undoubted success, for the effort put in by the members of the committee, even 'The Journal' was moved to point out the undue influence being exercised over the discussions. In its October report it said,

"....the Standing Orders Committee must not attempt to have discussions and decisions tailor-made. It is vital for the future progress of this idea that it should be permitted to grow in vitality and variety quite spontaneously".⁸⁸

At one point in a debate, a succession of 6 Austin stewards were called to speak.⁸⁹ In the December edition of 'The Journal' criticism of the role of the Steering Committee came into the open. One writer claimed,

"In my opinion the so-called Steering Committee is treating the delegates like a pack of children. And the sooner rank and file stewards get on their hind legs and stress their rights, the sooner WE shall be doing the 'Steering' and stop ourselves 'being steered' ".⁹⁰

One source of criticism was that the constitution, which had the approval of the Steering Committee, was not published prior to the Conference. Instead, it was read out before the Sunday morning session, unannounced, and without reference to the Conference agenda. A vote was called for without any opportunity for debate.

It would, however, be unfair to overstate the criticism in terms of the overall success of the conference. It was a major achievement for the organisers, who appeared to have galvanised a movement of stewards across a widely dispersed industry. They had placed the issue of automation and redundancy as the central issue in workplace

relations in the motor industry, and had agreed the 'Seven-Point Plan', by which automation could be challenged by the workforce. Though the conference, in the absence of union recognition of the steering committee, had left largely undefined its relationship towards officialdom, it was always clear that even without the support of union officials, decisions taken at conference would ultimately have to be realised by action in the workplace.

On the 30 November, in keeping with the resolution from Briggs Bodies over raising the question of automation at Government level, a delegation of 22 stewards and convenors lobbied their MP's at Westminster. This was arranged to be held in conjunction with support for a Private Member Bill 'Automation and Electronics' and sponsored by the MP for Bilston, Bob Edwards.⁹¹ The delegation of the leading workplace representative elected Dick Etheridge as their spokesman. A report of the days events was made by one of the Steering Committee. In this, he expresses his own view of automation. He states,

"I would like to give a few personal views on automation and to point out that no-one is going to oppose it. We have already made this quite clear but also we are just as sure that we are not going to accept the position of employers installing new machinery and then making thousands of workers redundant. The Chancellor of the Exchequer has already publicly stated that the days of over-ripe pheasant and port wine are over. If this is so, it must be made just as plain that the workers are not prepared to carry the entire burden on their shoulders. Higher taxation and more people on the dole is not our idea of the promised 'Tory Paradise'. The Government, no matter what party rules, must let the workers have the facts. Employers must be made to take the workers into their confidence. If the country is in financial difficulties, then the workers are prepared, as always, to do their share".⁹²

The 'Big Five' conferences revitalised an interest in workplace organisation in the motor industry. Under a central committee,

comprising the convenors and leading stewards drawn from the largest factories in the industry, the embryo of a motor industry shop stewards movement came into being. At these two, well supported conferences, while the declamations from the speakers rostrum made great play upon the workplace rather than the union, this heightening of confidence and workplace organisation, did not produce a distinctive workplace strategy. Under the guidance of the Steering Committee, the establishment of policy resolutions, while it fulfilled a vacuum which arose from a failure of national union leaderships to formulate an agreed approach by which to confront the employers on issues like redundancy and automation, the conferences, though not uncritical of the actions of union leaderships, never fully outlined their approach towards union officialdom. Although the conferences had arisen out of the impending rationalisation, automation, and fear of job loss, in a period of increased competition among the motor manufacturers for the market share in Britain, the workplace leadership were fully acquainted with the weaknesses in the Confederation structure for coping with issues particular to the motor industry. It was, however, perhaps partly the strategic position occupied by the leading members of the main plants where union membership was generally weak or unevenly organised, who depended to some extent on the support of the confederation for their position, that an ambiguous attitude developed towards officialdom. It was the pursuit of unity among the differing workplace unions, in conditions of low or declining union membership which both reinforced a dependence upon, and encouraged a part allegiance to officialdom and the constitutional apparatus of the confederation. Evident weaknesses in the workplace could not be overcome by the appearance of mass unity in conferences, no more than the inspiration these conferences gave to motor industry shop stewards could disguise the inherent ambiguity which arose

out of the deficiencies in union structures or the past performance of trade union leaders. The attitude of the local union leaderships, moreover, remained far less equivocal. Jack Jones stated, as early as 7 March 1955, his attitude towards the 'Big Five'. In the Coventry Telegraph he said,

"While desirous that members should be active the organised trade union movement did not welcome any tendency by sections or groups to make pronouncements on union matters which were the business of the unions executive committees".⁹³

George Rowley, the Coventry AEU DS, said of the Birmingham 'Big five' conference,

"The meeting was entirely unofficial".⁹⁴

The implications of such a predicament were to become realised in the mass strikes at Standard and BMC during 1956.

The Standard Automation Strike

The two week redundancy strike, which took place at the Standard Motor company in Coventry, at the end of April 1956, crystallised many of the issues which had been generally popularised by the 'Big Five' conferences of 1955. The Standard was not just the highest wage rate firm in the British motor industry, but it was the only plant with a 100 per cent union membership. From 1948 onwards, the whole of the Standard manual workforce was unionised. The company, under the chairmanship and personal involvement of Sir John Black, had built up a labour relations policy which combined a distinct employer paternalism with a close degree of co-operation with the workplace organisation. After the large redundancy in 1948, Sir John Black and Jack Jones, the Cov CSEU Secretary, entered into an agreement which established priority for future re-engagement

of those declared redundant. The basis of this agreement, unlike the undertaking given by the Austin works management in 1950, was that it was the unions which were to supply labour to the Standard.⁹⁵ This all but guaranteed future organisation at the works. In the workplace, these arrangements helped secure the position of the Communist Party, which had had a significant membership in the firm since the second world war. By March 1956, it was claimed that there was a 70 strong party membership in the C P branch at the works, in addition to a regular readership of some 350 to the party newspaper, the 'Daily Worker'. The most notable figure, Bill Warman, the chairman of the JSSC and party member, was also co-founder of the Motor Shop Stewards Meeting of 1952. Gordon Wright, another leading figure at Standard, was a current member of the 'Big Five' steering committee. Of the 7,000 copies of the Oxford Conference Report on automation which were sold in the motor industry, 2,000 had been taken up by a Standard workforce of 12,000.⁹⁶

After 1953, Standard had significantly expanded their interest in tractor production. The Ferguson tractor was being powered by a Standard engine. In addition to tractor production in the post war period, Standard had scrapped the manufacture of a range of car models and instead concentrated upon building one outstanding model for both home and export markets - the Vanguard. Though the smallest of the 'Big Five' car producers in terms of a manufacturing philosophy, the firm was among the most progressive in the industry. It combined relatively high investment and higher worker productivity through promoting a co-operative relationship with organised labour in the workplace. The design of its unique payments system sought to provide a basic level of financial security for individual

workers with a group incentive scheme based upon multi-skilled gangs. The management recognised the position of senior stewards, while the mixed composition of the gangs encouraged inter-union co-operation on the basis of common gang membership, as opposed to the more generally sectional or trade divisions. By 1954, Standard's investment per worker remained second only to that of Ford in Britain. It was two and a quarter times greater than that of Vauxhall and one and a half times more than Rootes.⁹⁷

The overall size of the company, relative to other members of the 'Big Five', gave rise to problems associated with the regeneration of capital, which restricted market growth. It was particularly prone to the challenge arising out of the intensification of competition for the domestic market, but it also suffered directly from the BMC merger. The Corporation took over the main body supplier to Standard, Fisher Ludlow, in 1953.

On the 7 January 1954, the beginnings of a new era emerged for the company. Sir John Black, who had personally dominated the running of the firm since 1930 and who had been the single influence in the decision to de-federate the company, in order to pursue a high wage-high productivity policy, retired as managing director. He was replaced by Alick Dick who, at the age of 37, became the youngest executive in the British Motor industry. Standard, unlike the federated companies, had most closely tried to build its post war industrial relations policies out of the spirit of war time co-operation. Consequently, prior consultation with the workplace leadership was well established over production and redundancy questions, before 1956. Over worker recruitment, the firms labour office would circulate its list of job vacancies with the respective workplace convenors and senior stewards for forwarding to their

local union offices. The union concerned would then select candidates from their registered vacancy list for interviews with the works management. This method generally ensured that worker victimisation or arbitrary management selection did not occur. Protection against victimisation in job selection was also protection upon grounds of political viewpoint. Workers who were members of the Communist Party were therefore largely unhindered if they were put forward for interviews. Such was the level of union co-operation by the management, that when Jack Jones complained about favouritism being exercised by a works manager, (it mainly concerned offering jobs to his relations), Sir John Black sacked the manager at half an hours notice.⁹⁸

In 1955, the workplace organisation had developed a policy of 'No redundancy', when nearly 1,000 workers were declared redundant from the firms production on area-engines, following the rundown of this industry in Coventry. After pressure from the JSSC, all those who wished to accept alternative employment at the Standard Car and tractor factories were found jobs.⁹⁹ By the 4 April 1956, this apparent growing autonomy of the Standard workplace organisation was becoming the subject of criticism on the AEU DC. A proposal from in the works to agree a constitution to form a 'Committee of unions to the Standard Motor Industry Agreements', was attacked for being contrary to the authority of the Cov CSEU. The AEU DC ruled, that the,

".....Constitution of the committee, who are responsible only to themselves and it was resolved that the DC does not recognise the Committee of unions signatory to the Standard Motor Agreements in its present form and constitution, and request that it be disbanded. The Committee should again be set up as it is doing useful work under its previous constitution with the addition that it comes under the control and jurisdiction of the CSEU DC".¹⁰⁰

The workplace organisation at Standard not being party to Federation agreements was not as nearly dependent upon the role of the local CSEU officials, as for example was the case at Austin. That agreements were based upon the plant rather than the Federation, and that management recognised and provided facilities for senior stewards, as well as the labour force being fully unionised, both strengthened the position of the workplace leadership and helped create the condition for the development of attitudes independent of officialdom. The fact that wage rates and working conditions were actually superior to that of the federated car firms, merely fueled these tendencies, while the presence of a significant Communist Party membership, particularly in the workplace organisation reinforced the values of unity within the workplace organisation and discouraged the tendencies towards inter-union squabbles and workplace sectionalism. The latter, of course, was also discouraged by the particular structure of the gang system.

The Strike which began on the 26 April had its origins both in a seemingly new approach on the part of the recent management to the problems confronting the industry and to the capacity for autonomous influence on the part of the workplace organisation. In February 1956 the Standard management at a works conference presented its plans for the re-structuring of tractor assembly prior to the production of a new model. The changeover was part of their £4½ million investment programme which would involve the virtual complete retooling of the whole production process, for what was described as the,

: "Biggest operation of its kind ever undertaken in England".¹⁰¹

The changeover was reported to require the movement of almost every

machine tool in the works, some 15,000 tons of plant, over 3,000 jigs and fixtures, 1,400 machines, 22 transfer lines, in addition to the moving of 15,000 tons of earth.¹⁰² It also involved the introduction of automation. The firm had invested in 160 rotary indexing machines which could carry out multiple operations on each component and required only a single operator. The multi million investment programme was expected to yield an increased output of 100,000 units per year, or approximately 30 per cent more than the existing output.¹⁰³

The management policy towards this extensive change-over, presented in February, was that the current model under construction would eventually be stopped as the change-over progressively got underway. The firm would not retain the full complement of 11,160 workers. It was stated that some 2,500 would be laid off, though increases in car production, it was hoped, might absorb some of these workers. Existing production would finish on the 18 May, but by July employment was expected to reach 10,000, while the remainder could be expected back in the works by the 13 August. The management, through complying with the company's past reputation for workplace prior consultation, were, however, infringing the shop stewards policy of 'No redundancy'. It was agreed that this February, works conference should stand adjourned while a sub-committee of shop stewards and management representatives investigated ways of avoiding the redundancy.

The Standard shop stewards immediately set about finding ways of keeping every worker employed and met to consider a number of alternatives to the redundancy. On the 29 March, they presented a Four-Point Plan to the works management,

- "1 That jobs common to both tractors should continue to run during the change-over
- 2 That jobs which could be quickly changed over should be proceeded with
- 3 That three-shifts should be introduced on car jobs
- 4 That short time should be worked throughout the company factories so that the maximum number of men affected could be absorbed". 104

The responses of the works management was to agree to continue to recognise the principle of short time working, where practicable, if it did not impede efficiency.

On the 11 April, car production began to fall and 97 workers in the Canley works were transferred and a further 30 were put on short time.¹⁰⁵ The works management, on the 25 April, presented their view of the shop stewards Four Point Plan. They rejected the 3-shift idea on grounds that, owing to the change-over insufficient charge hands and setters would be available to operate it. It also fell outside the management criteria of efficiency, but with recession now hitting car production there was much less room for transferring workers from tractor to car assembly. Instead, there would now be a redundancy of 2,640 which would be issued on the 18 May, of which only 230 could be expected to find employment in the car plant at Canley.¹⁰⁶ A clear difference emerged. The shop stewards argued that the change-over could be accomplished without a redundancy, under the plan, the management maintained that without prior agreement to discuss redundancy they were not prepared to talk about short time working.

Beyond a concern over the apparent increasing independent attitude being exercised by the workplace organisation at Standard, it is

clear that the local union officials were also aware of a much wider mood of change among shop stewards generally during what was the most severest post war employment crisis in the industry. This change did not appear to be entirely removed from the activities of the 'Big Five' organisation. On the 14^{MARCH,} the AEU NE, in answer to a Branch resolution from within the Coventry district, which certainly with the tacit support of the General and Purpose Committee, had called for the CSEU EC to,

".....use all their powers to bring under to wing the 'Big Five' organisation of shop stewards".107

The AEU EC replied,

"....that the CSEU had no power to convene a meeting of the shop stewards of the 'Big Five' organisation".108

During March 1956, as the momentum of the recession in the car industry began to have its affects in Coventry, both the AEU EC and DC were being subjected to criticism for their apathy towards the issue of automation in the industry. But when the AEU EC, perhaps partly to affect the impact of the 'Big Five' conferences, itself called a meeting of the National EC's of the principal unions in the industry, to meet at the Queen's Hotel in Birmingham, to discuss redundancy and short time working, it was the Coventry AEU DC which issued a rebuke. It agreed,

"That this DC informs NE they understood that the conference was to be on a broad a basis as possible with rank and file members and local officials in attendance and that if only members of the EC's are in attendance it merely encourages members to join the 'Big Five' organisation. We insist therefore that local full time officials be invited to attend the conference".109

and,

"That this DC is of the opinion that if no local representatives are at the conference they cannot associate ourselves with it as in their opinion it is not representative of the motor industry".110

On the 23 April, a meeting of 200 delegates from the 'Big Five' reaffirmed much of their previous policy but approved a resolution which called for,

"All possible support to members in any factory who took steps to shop dismissals, redundancy and short time working".¹¹¹

This meeting of the 'Big Five' was followed two days later by the conference of the AEU NC where the left won substantial support, in opposition to the wishes of the EC, on the issue of automation and redundancy. The NC agreed to,

"No automation without consultation".¹¹²

The motion insisted upon the retention of displaced labour where automation was being introduced until new work became available. The committee went on to pledge support for shop stewards and memberships who,

"resisted redundancy at the point of production".¹¹³

At the Standard works in Coventry, a firm with perhaps the city's closest connection with the 'Big Five', committee faced the company's refusal to implement its Four Point Plan. The management wanted to continue working a full week but implement the redundancy. This management scheme had, however, not anticipated the decision of the AEU NC. Furthermore its refusal was received like a "bombshell" by the leadership of the Standard JSSC. Following a meeting among the Standard stewards, strike action was recommended. A ballot of the gangs was undertaken to discover the feeling on the shop floor.

Behind the scenes, however, Jack Jones, who had now become Regional Secretary of the TGWU and Cyril Taylor, the AEU full time official, whose working relationship with Jones extended back to the war period,

had already accepted privately with the works management, that the new Standard tractor could not be introduced without some redundancy. They had both agreed that compensation for job loss, an entirely new concept in British labour relations, would be paid.¹¹⁴ Jones, however, opposed a public announcement on this, instead he wanted this to appear to come out of the negotiations.¹¹⁵ Management had completely misread the mood of the stewards. They fully expected that their redundancy proposals would have resulted in the CSEU officials being called in, at which point compensation would become the means for gaining an approval for redundancy. Both the new Standard management and the CSEU officials were taken completely by surprise at the speed at which the Standard workers moved to strike. On the 15 May, the AEU DC records how, taken unaware, the CSEU secretary, Harry Urwin, had tried to stop the strike.

"The Secretary of the JSSC at Canley, the car assembly plant had telephoned the secretary of the CSEU informing him of the impending strike. The Secretary had informed him 'keep the men at work at all costs. If they want to demonstrate let them sit down for an hour or even a day but under no circumstances should they come out'. The JSSC secretary had agreed with this and promised to do everything he could to prevent the stoppage".¹¹⁶

It was too late. A complete strike of the whole workforce began on the 26 April.

The Standard stewards felt that the management had actually changed its position; that for many workers the lay off would in fact become a permanent redundancy. The new Managing Director had, himself, been quoted in the press as saying,

"We are not installing £4 million worth of equipment in order to employ the same number of men. We can't carry people for fun".¹¹⁷

For the workplace leadership, the view was that the new management

were now utilising automation of the plant and the impending lay off for the change-over, not only to create a number of permanent redundancies but to weaken workplace organisation itself. No settlement, for example, had been agreed for the annual wage round. It was considered that the management, through redundancy wanted to be in a more powerful position to negotiate the rates for the new machinery.¹¹⁸ The workplace leadership also felt that their action was merely endorsing what was official Cov CSEU policy. On the 21 January, the Confederation had called a mass meeting of the city's 1,000 shop stewards to discuss employment in the district. In the first five months of 1956, redundancy was being anticipated at Alvis, Motor Panels, Jaguar, Daimler, Carbodies, as well as some 2,500 redundancies from Armstrong Whitworth Aircraft. Among the resolutions passed by the Cov CSEU meeting were,

- "1 Shop stewards to resist indiscriminate discharges of labour on grounds of redundancy and to insist on regular consultations in relation to production programmes in order effectively plan to meet fluctuations in labour loads.
- 2 Wherever practicable short time working should be worked until suitable jobs were available for workers likely to be displaced.¹¹⁹

These two resolutions had been moved by Harry Urwin the CSEU DS.

However a third resolution was moved from the floor of the meeting.

This read,

- "3 This meeting of Coventry shop stewards considers that full resistance must be shown to any deliberate action to form a pool of unemployed as advocated in some industrial and financial quarters. We call upon the Confederation District Committee to plan accordingly even to the extent of advocating industrial action. We also call upon the Government to halt the 'credit squeeze' which we contend is strangling productive effort".¹²⁰

At Standard, the Strike Committee on the question of automation followed the line adopted by the 'Big Five' Conference.

In addressing a mass meeting of the workforce on the 3 May, Bill Warman, the Secretary of the Strike Committee, was reported as saying,

"The Standard workers welcome any new scientific developments that will improve the production efficiency of the British Engineering industry. But we believe that such improvements are of no value unless the benefits of these improvements are passed on to the workers as well as the shareholders and to the employers. We therefore will do all we can to assist and improve production efficiency in this County but in doing so we shall also stand up for the right to have a full share-out of the increased wealth that ensures from that increased efficiency."121

The Standard automation strike, in the view of the workplace leadership, arose primarily out of the defence of jobs rather than opposition to automation. It was, for the Standard Strike Committee, a struggle over the distribution of benefits between capital and labour. Automation in itself was not being contested, there were no questions involving the defence of existing working practices or the protection of craft values. In a period when profits from the manufacture of cars had been growing substantially, it was not the workforce which should have to bear the full cost of change, nor should their workplace organisation be put at risk through redundancy. On the central point of the introduction of automation and the avoidance of redundancy, the Standard was in the front line of the 'Big Six' policies. On the management side, however, Standard were already in the process of planning the departure from their past industrial relations practices. Preliminary discussions for re-entry into the Employers Federation were underway before the automation strike. Standard, who were already operating a shorter working week and paying a wage rate above the district level, would clearly have to make adjustments to conform with the Federation. The nature of the settlement over the introduction of automation was, therefore, likely to become

a precedent for engineering as a whole. During the course of the dispute, the works management were in close but private contact with the secretary of the Coventry Association.¹²² The advice of the association was not, therefore, removed from the approach being adopted by the new managing director at Standard.

Though the Strike Committee, following the position adopted by the 'Big Five' conferences, went to great lengths to stress that they were not, in principal, opposed to automation, the Standard dispute became closely related to this aspect of the changeover. Sir Robert Boothby, chairman of the Industrial and Parliamentary Committee of the House of Commons, speaking at the Annual Festival Dinner of the Newspaper Press Fund held on the 5 May, said,

"I think there is a threat to this country at the moment which could be lethal, if we take the wrong turning on this business of automation on what this Standard strike is about..... If we really embark upon a new Luddite movement for smashing the machines it could be absolutely deadly to our position and I think it is one of the most serious menaces that has faced this country in many years..... We are just beginning to see the beginning of the signs of a movement which could be a deadly thing to this country, we are getting it at the Standard works at the moment".¹²³

On the 3 May, Sir Anthony Eden, the Prime Minister, called upon the MOL to produce a special report on the Standard strike.

Industrialists and trade union leaders were invited to Downing Street to discuss automation in industry and methods for overcoming labour problems.¹²⁴ The Department of Scientific and Industrial Research were asked to inquire into the likely affects of automation in British industry.¹²⁵ The consternation which automation and the Standard strike had caused was not confined to Politicians.

The dispute became a popular theme in the May Day speeches of labour leaders.¹²⁶ In Coventry, it was the Standard workers who led the May Day parade. Though the dispute was widely reported as being

an issue of automation, the Standard management accepted the strike committee's view of the dispute. In a public statement Alick Dick said,

"This is not a strike over the introduction of automation machines, the issue is simply that the workers claim we should introduce short time working instead of laying off men during the changeover. This we say is impracticable".¹²⁷

The Standard Strike Committee, while they enthusiastically set out to gain widespread rank and file support for their dispute, they were most insistent in their opposition to any attempts either to extend the conflict through, for example, sympathy action, or to allow the issue to be seen as being one of automation. This would appear to be part of a play on the part of the strike leadership to gain official recognition for the dispute from the national union leaderships.

To help gain support, the Strike Committee dispatched 35 shop stewards to address public meetings, trades council meetings, factory gate meetings, canteen meetings and shop steward meetings, in various parts of the Country. These stewards, however, were each given a number of explicit instructions, both in regard to the strike issue and the type of support being requested by the workplace organisation. Basically, these spokesmen were to try and raise financial and moral support and to request the 'blacking' of Standards products. They were also to ask for resolutions to be put to the leaderships of the engineering unions demanding official recognition. These stewards were informed that they should stress that the dispute was about the refusal of the company to discuss short time working and other alternatives to redundancy; that the firm were now asking for 3,500 redundancies¹²⁸ but making no guarantees over future re-employment. The strike committee maintained they merely

the policy of the Cov CSEU over resisting redundancy and that the dispute was essentially a choice between the "right to work" or the fight for each others job. In all speeches, these Standard stewards were informed not to broaden the issues involved beyond that of 'no redundancy'. There was to be no requests for sympathy action. Quite the contrary. On the 3 May, Eddie McGarry who had been appointed press spokesman for the strike committee ruled this out. Speaking for the Committee he said,

"We feel they are (fellow workers) far more valuable in work where they can contribute something towards the struggle in Coventry. It would be disastrous if they came out at this stage. We want the money".¹²⁹

It was finance, support for official backing and the 'blacking' of goods, rather than any expression of wider support that the Standard leadership sought from both within and outside the motor industry.

During the first weekend, over £1,000 had been collected.¹³⁰ From the North East Coast, the Strike Committee heard that a guaranteed £2,500 per week was being collected. From Fords, the workplace organisation gave an initial £200 plus a weekly levy from the membership which amounted to over £1,000 per week.¹³¹ A meeting of 200 AEU shop stewards in Coventry agreed to levy 5s. per worker per week, or an hours pay, for the duration of the dispute.¹³²

A similar pattern of response was being reported back to Coventry during the first week of the strike. Levies in workplaces were ranging from 4s. to 10s. per head. The 'Big Six' circulated a special appeal to over 1,000 shop stewards in the motor industry.

From the London area, a Standard steward sent a request back to Coventry for further assistance. His report to Eddie McGarry,

dated 2 May, gives an insight into the kind of support which the Standard cause possessed.

"I (need assistance) to cover other meetings which are literally showering in. And on this point Eddie, I am badly in need of other speakers to assist me. There are about 10 firms who want to hear us state our case next week from Monday onwards, these 10 are all around Park Royal. There are many others besides including a lot of Dock meetings. I have already had countless requests to address dock gate mass meetings next week. Enthusiasm is terrific and increasing. We are more than welcome everywhere. Money will I am sure flood in now. Everywhere down here covering all trades resolutions are going in demanding full financial support and full official recognition".¹³³

Two days later, the same steward is reporting back of addressing meetings of over 1,000 dockers from the Royal Group. He writes,

"...wonderful reception from the whole of the part of London. Dockers eager to help in everyway".¹³⁴

And on the 5 May, he writes,

"Terrific feeling now building up in London docks. Have had it reported tonight that the walls in that area have had 'Black Standard Goods' painted with whitewash".¹³⁵

By the end of the first week, he sends instructions for 2,000 collection sheets to be sent to various workplaces in London.

And for the docks, he states,

"Please get big boxes for collections on the docks".¹³⁶

Because of Standard's export markets, the docks became prime targets. In Liverpool, the Standard steward reported addressing meetings of 500 and 600 dockers throughout the port. He was formally met by the Mayor of Bootle, and received by a delegation of the City's full-time union officials. Standard's goods were reported as being blacked throughout Liverpool by the 5 May.¹³⁷

Besides the considerable financial contributions, messages of support were received in Coventry from over 130 labour organisations. These included 30 DC's ¹³⁸ of the AEU, plus scores of shop steward committees. The only form of sympathetic action in support of the strike was taken by the sub-contractors working on the changeover at Banner Lane. With the approval of the strike committee, they had withdrawn their labour on the 1 May. ¹³⁹ The strike committee hoped, by illustrating the level of support across the country, that the national union leadership would add its weight to the dispute. On the 2 May, all the AEU members on the strike committee lobbied the unions national conference, which was still in session. On the 6 May, a meeting of the NC's, with memberships at the Standard works, had been arranged for York.

In Coventry, the AEU DC had not only called for the dispute to be made official but had called a meeting of all its shop stewards and convenors in the District to arrange for a weekly levy of the membership for the Standard strike fund. ¹⁴⁰ A delegation from the strike committee, which included, Bill Warman, left Coventry to lobby the CSEU meeting at York, where the leaderships decision on the dispute would be made. By one vote, the York meeting failed to give its full backing for the dispute. Instead it recommended, that on the basis of an assurance that the management were prepared to re-open negotiations, the whole of the workforce were, after two weeks on strike, instructed to go back to work. A high level meeting between the Standard management and the National union officials was arranged for Sunday, 12 May. All unions agreed to pay strike pay. This meeting with management, however, was to be in London. The management terms for accepting this offer was that certain key workers should start on the Friday night shift in order to prepare the works for a full return on the Monday.

These proposals had to be put to a mass meeting of the Standard workforce at 11 am on the Friday, the day following the York meeting.

The leadership of the Standard strike committee travelled overnight from York and held a full committee meeting at 9.30, prior to the mass meeting. The notes of this meeting, though revealing the undoubted disappointment over the failure to gain official recognition, express no view for directly opposing the EC's decision. The main aim appeared to be that of preserving the unity of the workforce and prevent the spread of "gloom and pessimism". A 'Civil War' between the workplace and the executives was ruled out on grounds of being "divisive".¹⁴¹ It was claimed that the full time officials at the mass meeting would be able to influence a section of the workforce.¹⁴² Harry Urwin, the Cov CSEU secretary, outlined the views of the confederation leadership in proposing a return to work at the mass meeting on Earlsden Common. Cyril Taylor, AEU DO, seconded. The main argument of the officials was that, given the seriousness of the whole question of automation and the implications which the Standard dispute had for its introduction into other plants, it would have to be handled at the "highest level". Bill Warman then put the position of the strike committee. He said that they were prepared to recommend a return to work,

"On the clear understanding that there should be no redundancy at Standard Motors. Furthermore that within four days the National officers taking part in the negotiations take steps to report back to a mass meeting of workers at Standard".¹⁴³

The view of the Strike Committee was that they were in a strong position due to the support across the country to win the dispute,

but that they did not wish to enter into a dispute with the leadership of the unions. Warman went on,

"Dispite the fact we have not got all we want we know what we want, and we are determined to get it. We cannot ignore the repercussions throughout the whole country arising out of the dispute".¹⁴⁴

According to press reports of the meeting, a "large majority" voted in favour of a return, though "several hundred" were said to have voted against. Following the vote, Les Ambrose, one of the leading left wing figures on the AEU NC, who had addressed both of the 'Big Five' conferences in 1955, was reported as welcoming the decision of the meeting. He claimed that they would,

"do all in their power to see that the wishes of their members were carried out in their meetings with the management on Sunday....." ¹⁴⁵

He went on,

"The issues in the dispute are so big that I strongly support our members view that there should be no redundancy at the firm. The plans of the management should include looking after the people they mean to temporarily displace. The ball is now at the feet of the management and it is up to them to keep it in play". ¹⁴⁶

For the management however, the negotiations were, unlike the position of the strike committee, entirely unconditional.

In response to the decision of the mass meeting, Alick Dick said of his conversation with Harry Brotherton, the chairman of the CSEU,

".....Mr Brotherton gave further personal assurances that there were no conditions either asked for or agreed. The management of the Standard Motor Company therefore makes it clear that while welcoming employees back on Monday they do not recognise the special condition made by the Strike Committee at this meeting".¹⁴⁷

'No redundancy', in other words, the central position of the workplace organisation, was not to be the central condition in the negotiations with officials, even though it was perhaps the main demand which brought about the return to work. Harry Urwin stated the following day that the "clear understanding of no redundancy" was not part of the resolution agreed by the mass meeting. It was, he said, "an opinion".¹⁴⁸ To add to the obscurity, the meeting between the employers and the CSEU leadership was to be in London and not Coventry; the actual venue was being kept secret. The industrial correspondent of the Coventry Evening Telegraph reported on 12 May,

"It is generally agreed in industrial circles that the negotiations between the management and the union leaders will be the most important between management and unions since the war. The outcome will not only concern the Standard workers but if a satisfactory agreement is reached, it may well result in industrial peace throughout the engineering and shipbuilding industries".¹⁴⁹

The meeting in fact took place at Standard's London office. On the union side, the meeting was attended by a number of the most significant left wing leaders in the engineering unions. Besides Les Ambrose and Harry Brotherton, there was Joe Scott of the AEU and Frank Cousins, the newly elected General Secretary of the TGWU, in addition to Frank Winchester, the General Secretary of the NUVB. The Standard negotiations were the first high level discussions Cousins had participated in since his election to office. The three hour meeting agreed to refer the matter back to local level, through the constitutional procedure for the company. The public responses from the union side were largely optimistic over the possibilities of an agreed settlement. Brotherton was reported as being "quite happy"¹⁵⁰. Cousins regarded the discussions as being "favourable", while Scott was "confident the whole matter would be speedily resolved".¹⁵¹ Even Phil Povey, chairman of the Standard press

committee, was quoted as being satisfied with the London decision.¹⁵² The only new element in the discussions was a suggestion from the union side that the workforce should be employed for four out of every five weeks on the 34 hour guaranteed week. From the management side however, came what was previously the view of Jack Jones and Cyril Taylor, of compensatory payments for lay-off during the period of the change-over. In order to allow the discussion in Coventry to proceed, the works management offered to put back by a week their planned 3,490 redundancies. The men returned to work on the 14 May. The TGWU and the AEU announced that they would be paying dispute benefit for the 14 day period of the strike. On the 16 May, the works conference attended by the Cov CSEU full time officials and the Standard senior stewards, was adjourned for one week for the company to examine questions of detail.

In the meantime, the issue of the Standard automation dispute was debated in the House of Commons on the 17 May,¹⁵³ and in Paris, at an eleven nation meeting of National union officials in the motor industry; a gathering organised by the International Federation of Metal workers.¹⁵⁴ Back in Coventry, however, the works conference held on the 25 May was again adjourned. This time it was to discuss putting 6,000 of the car workers at Canley on a four day week and the transfer of 1,000 tractor workers from the Banner Lane assembly tracks to production on cars. On the 31 May, at the conclusion of the final negotiations, the management addressed a meeting of all the Standard stewards and the CSEU DC officials. While the announcement was being made to the officials and workplace organisation, the foremen were on the shop floor issuing 1,325 redundancy notices. A further 1,315 were to be presented in three weeks time.¹⁵⁵ The management were prepared to

accept the absorption of 1,200 tractor workers but were making 2,640 redundancy. The redundant workers would each receive £15 compensation provided they worked their full week's notice. When the stewards left the meeting to find the notices already served, they called a meeting to consider an immediate strike. The local officials were present and the strike resolution was replaced with,

"That this shop stewards meeting recommends to workers employed by Standard Motor Company that we ask the National officials to take immediate steps to call an official strike in view of the failure of negotiations at local level. Furthermore, that a further shop stewards meeting be held at 1pm next Monday to consider the decision of the executives".¹⁵⁶

Alick Dick later recalled,

"That night the shop floor was littered with redundancy notices. Chaps just tore them up. But the point had been made, out of 4,000 employees we had 2,000 chaps who knew they were going to go and the rest knowing they were going to stay. Able to get the vote after that".¹⁵⁷

The union executives were, as ever, split. The NUVB, at an emergency EC meeting, handed the decision over to a sub-committee which would make a decision on the basis of a CSEU meeting to be held at York. On the 5 June, the TGWU GEC set out a policy for guidance of the national secretary of the Engineering Trade Group.

- "1 That Council is not prepared to accept the management of a company can issue dismissal notices in the middle of negotiations, this being contrary to established practice and procedure and likely to undermine good industrial relations.
- 2 An approach should be made to the management for the reopening of negotiations
- 3 If necessary the intervention of the Ministry of Labour should be sought.
- 4 In the event of management refusing to reopen negotiations, or alternatively, should the negotiations prove abortive from the point of view of the introduction of sensible work sharing arrangements to avoid dismissals, consultation

to take place at local level on the question of serving strike notices.

- 5 Members of this union who are displaced pending the difficulty being resolved be financially supported to the extent to grants equal to dispute benefit subject to review". 158

The development of this policy was to be left with Cousins, in consultation with Harry Nicolas, the union's Engineering Trade group Secretary.

In Coventry, the full implications of the redundancy were only just becoming realised. The AEU DS, George Rowley said, on the 1 June,

"Our officials are alarmed at the fact that Mr Dick issued redundancy notices while the works conference was in session. This indicated that he had made up his mind before the conference started. This is an astonishing thing and a constitutional breach of faith". 159

The next day a special AEU DC meeting supported the resolution of the Standard Stewards which called upon the full time officers to declare an official strike. It was becoming evident the effect the management action had had upon the unity within the workplace organisation. The issuing of the notices had clearly divided those redundant from the workers to be retained. The Standard stewards found an uneven response among the workforce. At Banner Lane, the tractor plant, only 13 workers had voted against the shop stewards resolutions, but some workers did not vote. In Canley, the vote was far from unanimous, and a number of sections had solidly voted against the stewards resolution. On the AEU DC, support for the position taken by the full time officials and the workplace leadership was carried by 18 - 6 votes,¹⁶⁰ but an amendment calling for a national strike across the whole of the motor industry, to force a general policy on automation, was defeated by 13-9 votes.¹⁶¹

The meeting at York saw the national leaderships both uncertain and divided. They were torn between the consequences of allowing the redundancy to go unchecked, with taking a stand on an issue which they could see no way to resolving. Brotherton claimed, "Nobody had been very anxious to start a pretty shocking dispute". No vote had been taken. On a resolution from the sheet metal workers, and seconded by the vehicle builders, which called for an official strike, Brotherton explained,

"We have no constitutional authority to give instructions of any kind, only to make recommendations. I think in the circumstances it was better not to go to the vote. The odds are that the amendment (the SMW and NUVB proposition) might have been carried had we voted".¹⁶²

The view of the leadership was that those in employment would be prepared to accept short time working to help save jobs. This did not have the approval of the Standard management. Instead, the national officials called for a meeting with the MOL. The main divide at this crucial meeting at York was between the AEU and the smaller craft unions who held to a position of 'no redundancy' and the TGWU who appeared increasingly willing to concede the inevitability of redundancy in certain situations. Indecision at national level was having consequences in the workplace. The day after the York meeting, Eddie McGarry, acting as spokesman for the JSSC from the three Standard plants in Coventry, Banner Lane, Fletchamstead, and Canley, said the stewards had agreed to await the meeting with the Minister. They had called for an interim report from the National Executives. He went on however,

"We protest to the company at the indiscriminate method of the proposed sackings.... It doesn't matter whether you have one, ten, twenty or thirty years service by the look of things - if you are in the way of the scythe you are chopped down".¹⁶³

The meeting with the MOL produced nothing tangible. Part of the public statement read the,

"Minister said he fully understood the concern of the unions about the position of their members who were losing their employment at Standard's. He hoped this would be clear from the readiness to see the unions at once. He felt bound, however, to emphasise that where the demand for particular production dropped individual workers in the firms affected could not be expected to be guaranteed retention of their jobs. Whether or not there was sufficient work in a particular form to keep all its workers was for the firm to decide".¹⁶⁴

Pressure from the MOL appears to have been introduced to get the management back in talks with the union officials. The second round of 1,000 redundancies was postponed for seven days to consider a further shop stewards proposal for putting the whole of the works on a 3 day week to save further redundancies. On the 26 June, 9 national union officials, on the basis of returns from the workplace suggesting the acceptance of a 3 day week, entered the final stage of the redundancy negotiations.

Ambrose of the AEU was saying that his union was still prepared to consider support for an official strike call. As the national leadership was preparing for this round of negotiations with the Standard management, Nicholas was claiming,

"This is the end of the road so far as talks are concerned. The unions had now to decide whether to accept the position or reject it".¹⁶⁵

Unemployed Standard workers lobbied the union leaders who met for a pre-negotiating meeting at the AEU District Office in Coventry. They appeared with posters proclaiming "Don't make Standard workers the Vanguard of mass unemployment". "Your vote today keeps the Dole away". and "Don't pull up the ladder - 1,600 are overboard".¹⁶⁶

In the workplace, the Standard stewards held a ballot among the

remaining workforce. This showed the overwhelming majority, including those on the car assembly, were prepared to accept a three day working week. But on the question of a strike, the vote was divided. Based upon a show of hands from sectional meetings, 4,000 were reported to be opposed to strike action. Some 3,000 supported a stoppage while a further 3,000 were undecided. The 1,350 already dismissed did not vote.¹⁶⁷

On the 26 June, the final round of talks began. The following day, the officials had got the Standard management to postpone the redundancy of a further 1,000 workers for seven days to consider the practical implications of a three day week. Negotiations were adjourned until Tuesday, 3 July, to await the managements decision. On the 27 June, however, came the news that BMC had declared a redundancy of just under 6,000 workers, the discharge of which would take place immediately. The following day, the Standard management requested Harry Urwin to attend the works. He was issued with a statement about to be given to the press. This said,

"The Board is forced to the conclusion that it is put under duress by threats of strike action. Negotiations under duress is quite impossible. We have throughout the months of negotiations tried at all times to resolve the difficulties amicably in the interests of the company and its employees. It is now however abundantly clear that management are being pressed to submit completely to the extravagant demands of certain minorities".¹⁶⁸

Less than twenty-four hours after agreeing to examine the three day week proposal and the day following the BMC announcement of mass redundancies, the Standard management broke off negotiations with the national union leaderships. The offer to re-examine the extension of short time working was withdrawn. In the course of the next four weeks, a further 1,000 redundancies were added to the

2,500 dismissals associated with the changeover from tractor production. The recession in the car markets compounded the difficulties which confronted both the Standard management and the workplace organisation. By August, an 11,500 workforce had been cut to 7,000, its lowest post war level.¹⁶⁹ The 'no redundancy' policy of the strongest organised shop floor in the British motor industry was in tatters. In the implementation of the redundancy, the left wing workforce leadership was virtually decimated.¹⁷⁰ A large number of shop stewards were included in the "indiscriminate" redundancies. The Standard management paid £7 to £10 compensation to each worker redundant. On the 24 August, the company announced that its changeover plans were now complete. In an agreed statement with the unions, a three day week on car assembly was announced together with a further 1,000 redundancies. Part of the agreed statement read,

"Discussions have taken place with the local trade union officials and senior shop stewards who are fully acquainted with the necessity for reducing manpower during the present situation".¹⁷¹

The Standard management, in a decisive break from past labour relations policies, had effectively prepared the way for its re-entry into the EEF. It overcame federated criticism of its permissive approach to workplace organisation. A powerful JSSC had built up, based upon the companies three Coventry plants, in which senior stewards were accorded recognition and facilities by the management. The positions of the senior stewards had developed as this medium sized firm pursued its corporate objective of fast self-financing growth, upon a strategy of product specialisation through maximising piecework earnings, productivity, and union co-operation. As Standard expanded its commercial interests into the less volatile tractor markets, stability of employment provided the conditions

within which a left wing workplace leadership, containing a significant level of active communist party membership, increased its influence in the workplace organisation during the early post war period. The workplace organisation was closely connected to the promotion of inter plant contact. In the Coventry plants, this workplace leadership was able to establish a considerable level of workplace unity on a policy of high wages and job security in an industry notorious for the absence of stability. The uniqueness of the large multi-plant gang system provided not only a power base for the senior stewards but, besides their status in their own union, they retained an authority over the gang memberships in general. This distinctive position of Standard and its isolation from the industrial relations approaches of the Federation, encouraged tendencies towards autonomy within the workplace organisation.

It was the daily co-operation between works management and senior stewards, rather than the dependence upon local trade union officials, through which the policies encouraging flexible working arrangements and a high wage strategy were based. Confronted with recession and the continuance of high productivity through automation, the only 100 per cent workplace organisation in the British motor industry sought to defend job security through a reliance upon the actions of national union leaderships. It was the ascendancy of the TGWU in the motor industry, following a number of important moves to the left in the unions hierarchy, which marked not only a break from the assortment of craft based unions which had been the main organisers of labour in the industry, but which paved the way for a conditional acceptance of redundancy in exchange for workers compensation at joint consultation. Standard, the highest wage factory in the industry, was unable to enforce the policies of the

'Big Five' and, in the end, paid the price through the destruction of its workplace organisation. It was, however, to be the resolution of the BMC mass redundancy which was to seal the fate of the workplace policy of 'no redundancy' in the domestic motor industry. The implications of the duality between workplace policies and the actions of 'officialdom' were to become more apparent.

The BMC 1956 Redundancy Strike

On Wednesday, the 27 June 1956, union officials from the districts within which eight of the BMC factories were located, were requested to attend a meeting at exactly 11 am with the Corporation's works managements. At each of these meetings, the CSEU officials present were issued with a statement which had been prepared for the press. This statement, which was about to be released, revealed that 5,900 of the corporation's 42,700 manual workers were that afternoon to be given a week's wages in lieu of notice of redundancy, and would be finished from the company on Friday, 29 June. In all, 4,820 jobs were to go from the Birmingham plants of the BMC, 3,000 of these would be from Longbridge. A further 1,000 would be lost at Oxford, 100 from South Wales but none from Coventry. The union officials were informed that the redundancies would be carried out by "last in - first out" on a sectional basis, though the interpretation of this might vary in accordance to local practice. An offer of future employment, for those who would wish to return to the Corporation when trade improved, would be made on the basis of service. While this meeting of officials was taking place across the plants affected, at Longbridge, the superintendent of foremen was holding a similar meeting with a number of the shop stewards in the North works canteen. At Austin, the general works manager, J R Edwards, gave permission for the CSEU officials to hold a meeting in the works with the 230 of the plant's shop stewards in

the course of the afternoon. From the very start, it was clear that the BMC management were most concerned to deal only through the full time union officials rather than through the workplace organisation. Their whole policy towards enacting the redundancy was clearly influenced by the handling of the dispute at Standard. At Longbridge, in explaining the arrangements for the redundancy, Edwards informed the local CSEU officials, that,

"Simultaneously with the union officials being told at this meeting at Ilam, the shop stewards in the various factories were being told, and the news was being released to the press. Originally we had intended to see the stewards at 2.30 this afternoon. The disadvantage of this was that the news would have been abroad before lunch and before the shop stewards had been told. We felt it was better to do it simultaneously but there was no question of any discourtesy to the officials".¹⁷²

The arrangements by the management appeared to be guided by a concern to offset a possible spontaneous reaction in the workplace. For the BMC management, there was to be no prior consultation, no joint working party composed of shop stewards and management to examine alternatives to redundancy. The notices served would result in 12½ per cent of their labour force being removed from employment at little more than a day's notice. Moreover, 87½ per cent of the BMC manual workforce would know that they were still in employment. By informing the unions, the workplace organisation and the press all at the same time, the BMC management were serving a *fait accompli*. Even the MOL were given information of the redundancies two days before the unions, on Monday, 25 June.¹⁷³

At a time when the BMC management had observed the divisions and the uncertainty within the national trade union leadership over the issue of redundancy in the Standard dispute and having seen how the 'no redundancy' policy of such a well organised workplace had been surmounted, partly by the willingness of union officials to compromise,

the BMC management had decided to act quickly to pre-empt possible organised opposition, particularly from within the workplace. From the outset, unlike the experience of Standard, the control over the workers side would be retained throughout by the national trade union officials. It was the union leaderships which would define the issues and determine the grounds for a settlement, rather than the workplace organisation. Although the official BMC strike was to be seen as a success for organised wage labour, in conjunction with the outcomes of the Standard strike, the strike in the Corporation completely redefined the 'right to work' concept in British industrial relations. Under the growing ascendancy of a left wing national trade union leadership, the traditional barriers of job control gave way to the acceptance of expendable employment in exchange for workplace recognition and a joint say in the process of job loss.

At the Austin works in Longbridge, the workplace organisation had all but recovered from the disabling affects of the McHugh dispute of 1953. By the beginning of 1956, the Longbridge manual workforce had grown by a further 2,800 to little short of a total of 20,000 employees. At the annual General Meeting of the Austin shop stewards, held on the 3 January for the election of a works committee and the workplace leadership, in the presence of the local CSEU full time officials, a total of 368 stewards cast their votes compared to only 88 in July 1953, the height of the McHugh affair.¹⁷⁴ This sharp increase in union workplace representation, under the guidance of the local CSEU officials, did little to alter the leadership of the works committee. It remained broadly based, with its nine places being occupied by the members of seven unions. Etheridge, with the highest vote on the committee, was again returned

as Secretary and Convenor, while Varnom was re-elected as chairman. Less than a week after these elections, a four day week was introduced to most parts of Longbridge, as well as other plants in the Corporation. The initial announcement by management suggested the short time would last 3 to 8 weeks. In fact, it lasted in large part for nearly 5½ months, as the recession began to bite sharply into car sales and production.

The response of the workplace organisation at Austin was to develop a policy towards short time working based around the policy demands created by the 'Big Five' Oxford Conference. On the 11 January, a special JSSC meeting agreed to a policy recommendation drawn up by the Works Committee.

- "1 The shop stewards and Joint Production Committee shall invite the management to make a joint representation to the Government to
 - a) remove the barriers to world trade
 - b) remove the purchase tax and remove recent restrictions on hire purchase and credit loans.
- 2 The management should pay good time-keeping bonus and cost of living bonus in full to those who are on short time.
- 3
 - a) No overtime to be worked
 - b) No one to do the job of anyone else
 - c) Four days work in four days not five
 - d) Stewards should be consulted on any matter arising out of working the present four day week.
- 4 Full support for the implementation of the 40-hour week and the present wage application".175

Writing the front page article which appeared in the February edition of 'The Journal', Varnom, the chairman of the JSSC said,

"The stewards and members at Austin do not accept the principle that four days is better than redundancy. We accept the principle that we are entitled to full employment and that if the Government is unable to carry this out, they should be replaced by one that will".176

This four point policy was adapted by the BMC combine committee as workplace policy across the Corporation. Varnom's three column article, however, made no reference to a demand for 'no redundancy'. At Longbridge, the Austin stewards held meetings on their sections to bring to the notice of the membership the short time policy. The JSSC heard managements reply at their regular February meeting. The minute reads,

"The management had refused to make joint representations to the Government. They had agreed that no overtime should be worked that was not necessary. They had agreed to stop all fresh labour from starting except for specialised labour that had to be replaced. They had agreed that no men should do another man's job on his day off. They refused to pay the good time keeping bonus in full, or the national bonus in full or to pay the full holiday credits to the men on short time".177

Besides the establishment of a short time policy which did not have an entirely negative response on the part of management, the early part of 1956 saw the development of an important change which would have implications for not just removing the feuding between the workplace organisation and the TGWU at Longbridge, but also for the general conduct of the national union leaderships towards the issue of redundancy. The primary cause of this change, which brought the TGWU back into full participation in the workplace organisation, stemmed from a change in the personnel of the union's local officials. Jack Jones moved from Coventry to become the TGWU secretary for No 5 Region, while Les Kealey was appointed D O with particular responsibility for the union's Austin membership. Kealey immediately set about healing the wounds still present between his

union's stewards and the JSSC, which went back to both the McHugh and Pegg and Bills disputes. On the 28 March, Kealey wrote to Etheridge regarding the continued refusal of the JSSC to allow the attendance of a TGWU steward at JSSC meetings. His letter said,

"I would be pleased if you would make it quite clear to your committee that resulting from my request, immediately on taking over the Austin membership, a decision was taken to co-operate fully with the jointshop stewards committee on the basis of equality. This can be the only basis in future co-operation, which I am sure you feel is as important as we do".¹⁷⁸

Referring to the breakaway committee, to which his own union had been the central inspiration, he wrote to Etheridge.

"I understand that at the last meeting of the JointShop Stewards Committee reference was made to an unofficial body of shop stewards, which I believe calls itself a trade union education committee, and in fact goes to the press describing itself as an anti-Communist organisation. It was informed that this body consisted of a group of shop stewards of this union. The Austin branch of this union, therefore, feel that it should be placed on record:

- 1 That it is known that members of a number of unions meet in this body
- 2 That although the two officers of the committee were at one time shop stewards of this union, the present position is that Bro.W Davis is still a member, but does not represent the union in any official capacity and Mr Sullivan is not even a member of this union now, and is in fact, as far as we know, a nonner".¹⁷⁹

Kealey went on to reaffirm the commitment of the TGWU towards workplace unity and organisation at Longbridge.

"All TGWU shop stewards at the Austin motor company are being informed that they should not attend meetings of this disruptive organisation".¹⁸⁰

This movement to the left in the local TGWU hierarchy of officials, while it promoted unity on the CSEU constituted workplace organisation

at Austin, these same officials sought to increase the influence of their union but distance it from the interplant activities of the shop stewards. Following the September conference of the 'Big Five' for example, the Midland officials of the TGWU held their own conference in Coventry on the 23 October. This gathering of 50 of the unions stewards and local officials, welcomed the introduction of automation and other new techniques to the motor industry and called for urgent attention to be given towards establishing joint consultations between employees and the representatives of the workforce to enable this change to be brought about.¹⁸¹ On the other hand, the shop stewards movement in the motor industry was firmly wedded to the realising of its policies through the officially established channels. In December 1955, Les Gurl wrote in 'The Journal' of the Oxford Conference,

".....the Conference will have served no useful purpose unless we can get the Seven-Point Plan agreed to by our members, unions and shop stewards committees. We have agreed to try and get the MP's to meet delegates from the motor industry".¹⁸²

When it came to the strike at Standard, the 'Big Five' steering committee set up a sub-committee to deal with collections for a strike fund. It recommended a levy of 1/- per head for all plants, while a resolution had been telegraphed to the York meeting asking for official recognition of the dispute. At Austin, the works committee, on the 28 May, decided to send a resolution of protest against the failure of the national union leaderships to support Standard. The 'Big Five' held a conference in June at which the Standard redundancy was the most important issue. The conference called for official support. Its press release of the 25 June read,

"following discussions of the Standard dispute a resolution was passed.

'that the National official trade union leadership should declare that any redundancy of this character will be answered by official support and action against the employers and that immediate steps should be taken to remedy the position at Standards' "183

In a reference to a redundancy dispute at the Norton Motors in Birmingham, where 400 of the firms workers had struck over a redundancy of 26 AEU members, the 'Big Five' press release, acknowledging that the engineering union had given this strike official backing, said, four days before the BMC redundancy,

"The Norton strikers are now in the vanguard of the fight against redundancy".184

Confronted by mass redundancy at BMC, it was the local officials who from the outset, took the initiative and even defined the issues. The response in the workplace remained largely spontaneous and generally unco-ordinated, despite the policies of the 'Big Five' and the organisational inter plant links established through the combine committee. The common feature among the workplace leadership lay less in independent actions but rather upon an agreement which called for an official dispute. Such an approach, consequently, did not infringe the actions of the local union officials even when such officials appeared to be clearly at odds with the basic 'Big Five' and BMC combine policies of 'no redundancy'.

At Nuffield Metal Products, within 90 minutes of the official announcement that 700 jobs were to go in the Birmingham factory, the JSSC called a meeting of the whole workforce. With one of six of the plants jobs to go, there was considerable discontent. An approach was made to the works management for negotiations. This was refused on grounds that the decision had been a corporate one.

On the night shift, where the redundancies were again the subject of grievance, 1,000 workers walked out. The dispute was led by Tom Evans the Works Convenor and the Chief Steward of the Vehicle Builders. Evans was the only member of the BMC Standing Order Committee to be engaged in unofficial industrial action. The following day the dispute had spread to the day shift. Before the implementation of the redundancy notices, three quarters of the Nuffield Products workforce was out on strike. A mass meeting was called for Monday, 2 July, to discuss what further action should be taken.

In contrast, at Longbridge, a meeting of the plants 200 stewards met in the presence of the local union officials. The stewards ended a three hour meeting by calling unanimously for an official strike. The announcement of the position of the Austin workplace organisation was made by J T Bolas, the Secretary of the Birmingham CSEU. He said after the meeting,

"The shop stewards want drastic action and the thing we are bitter about is that we were not informed until, at the most, 24 hours before the sackings that they were going to take place".¹⁸⁵

The strike call was forwarded to the union executives. Down in Oxford, where 1,000 jobs were lost less than 400 workers out of a combined workforce of 8,500 from the Cars and Radiator plants turned up at a mass meeting. Unlike Austin, the vote was taken at a meeting of the membership rather than by the stewards, but the outcome was the same. Both plants called for an official dispute within seven days if the notices were not withdrawn.¹⁸⁶ In the course of the weekend two developments occurred. On the Saturday, the BMC Combine Committee met in Birmingham under the chairmanship of Dick Etheridge. Also in attendance, were invited delegates from the 'Big Five' motor

stewards. The meeting called for four measures,

- "1 That the union executives call for an official strike throughout the BMC if the dismissal notices are not withdrawn.
- 2 To organise a mass lobby of the House of Commons by up to 10,000 motor workers on the 9 July.
- 3 To arrange simultaneous mass demonstrations against dismissals in Birmingham, Coventry and Oxford on a date to be fixed.
- 4 A call for the Government to set up an important inquiry into the workings of the motor industry, including its sales policy". 187

On the same day, however, a meeting was also taking place between the regional officials and the senior stewards of the TGWU from the factories and districts of the BMC. The demands of this meeting were,

- "1 An immediate meeting between the union National Executives representatives and the BMC Board of Directors.
- 2 Reinstatement of all dismissed workers pending further discussions or the payment of substantial compensation to the dismissed men while they were looking for other work.
- 3 An undertaking that any further men dismissed should receive a months notice and financial compensation for the loss of work". 188

While the BMC combine committee was calling for an official strike, there were no calls to take action in the workplace against redundancy. On the other hand, there was no call for a strike by the TGWU officials; it was reinstatement, to enable discussions to take place or discussion with the Corporation on compensation. Among the NUVB, a meeting of its Midland Shop Stewards, which learned that Bill Nordoff, their relatively recently elected chief steward at Longbridge, was among a number of shop stewards who were made redundant, followed the position adopted by the Combine Committee.¹⁸⁹

At the mass meeting on the 1 July, at Metal Products, it was the local officials who persuaded the workforce to return to work in order that negotiations could proceed. Though Evans, the works convenor, had been challenging the right of the redundancy, Jack Jones saw the dispute in a different light. He said after the meeting,

"Those men acted under strong provocation and their actions emphasise the need for the fullest consultation with the unions before dismissals of this magnitude are made..."¹⁹⁰

He then went on,

"We realise that the circumstances may arise in which the displacement of labour cannot always be avoided but we feel that is no excuse for employers to evade the great social responsibilities which they assume when employing labour".¹⁹¹

Beard, the TGWU DO, also at this meeting stated,

"Trade unionists had been sensible and realise that when the industries market dries up there was bound to be some displacement of labour. When people had been brought into the industry on a promise of employment for years ahead, there was an obligation on the employers to give adequate notice of any displacement of labour and adequate compensation".¹⁹²

Geo. Evans, however, the NUVB DO, said there were no guarantees of re-engagement for those dismissed. He claimed, of the return to work,

"The most we can say is that consultation will take place".¹⁹³

While the national trade union leadership had been split over the question of 'no redundancy' in the Standard dispute, all the early indicators in the BMC redundancy were that the TGWU officials appeared to be taking a clear lead in which the acceptance of redundancy was being seen as inevitable. Their main objections

were addressed more to the manner in which the redundancy had been carried out, and for a demand that compensation should be paid. The workplace leadership, on the other hand, showed few signs of allowing the feelings in the workplace to be manifest in independent workplace action. With the exception of Metal Products, the only other evidence of workplace sanctions surrounding the redundancy decision appeared to be a "go slow" at the Birmingham body plant of Fisher Ludlow.¹⁹⁴ On the 2 July, the industrial correspondent of The Times could report,

"Indignation among workers at the dismissals without previous consultation produced immediate strikes and threats of strikes on Friday at several BMC factories, but it does not look as though the majority of the workers employed by firms will take matters into their own hands at least before the meetings to be held in the next few days".¹⁹⁵

The position of the union officials, where clear divisions on policy towards redundancy existed between the number of small craft unions, including the policy of the AEU NC and the greater willingness on the part of the TGWU to acquiesce over the basic question of principle, still left the national union officials divided and more uncertain than ever on how to respond to the actions of the BMC management. At local level, the effectiveness of the officials discouraged strike activity and put the case into Procedure. On the 28 June, an informal conference had been held at Longbridge and attended by 12 local officials from 10 of the unions with a membership at the plant. Etheridge was the only workplace representative in attendance. The works management merely restated their reasons for their actions, while the unions endeavoured to establish a clarification over details. Dick Etheridge, however, made the point that,

".....relations over the past four years had been better at the Austin Motor Company than ever previously. This (the redundancy) was a retrograde step. The stewards had been pleasantly surprised at the understanding that they

had been able to get about short-time working. There had been much more notice than in the present case.... the stewards had been co-operative. They accepted transference to other factories and the principle of mobility of labour". 196

On the 4 July, a Works Conference was held in Birmingham at which seven of the BMC factories were represented. The terms of reference were,

"That the trade unions desire to discuss the manner and method adopted when dismissal notices were given to the workpeople at the British Motor Corporation". 197

This conference centred upon a discussion of "The need, the method and the manner". 198 Though it was always going to be inconclusive, on the intervention of national union officials it was agreed to adjourn procedure to enable informal discussion to take place between national union officials and the senior management of BMC. Much of the argument at local level had surrounded questions of implementation. The local officials were claiming that the short period of notice and the unwillingness to allow the workforce to work out its weeks notice, prevented the unions from making representations in cases of hardship. Furthermore, the extent to which transfers and reorganisation had been accepted by the workforce created considerable anomalies in operating a "last in - first out" selection policy. The only stoppages at Austin were spontaneous reactions towards management attempts to demand transfers of workers to the jobs of those who had been made redundant. After an argument, 50 workers stopped, but within a short time over 3,000 had downed tools. 199 This, perhaps the largest, was one of many small stoppages which remained unco-ordinated across Longbridge. The workplace leadership, however, not wishing to prejudice their position, chose to settle these disputes in isolation rather than extend them. Their whole

strategy was directed at gaining official support of the National officials, rather than be the spearhead for independent action in the workplace. The position of the national officials was far from clear.

The CSEU NE empowered Nicholas, (TGWU), Ambrose (AEU), Roberts (NUVB) and Townsend (SMW) to meet with the BMC top management in order to,

"....secure the best possible terms for the dismissed workers". 200

The employers, while conceding to the informal meeting after adjourning procedure, had no intention of making concessions. Their acceptance of the union delegation was merely to offset public criticism. The Federation's advice to their local association, on the 3 July, was for acceptance.

"It was suggested to him (John Hope BW EEA) that there was great danger in refusing to meet this request, which was for informal discussions outside the Procedure. The unions would be able to make considerable use in any publicity of management refused this request for a meeting. At the same time it would be competent for the firm to point out that the question was in Procedure, and every effort should be made to avoid creating a feeling that the Procedure was not appropriate or that informal methods would be likely to achieve better results". 201

The demands put to the employers, particularly the position of the TGWU put by Nicholas, represented the clearest shift away from opposition to redundancy as an end in itself. The four leaders put six main requests to BMC senior management in the presence of John Hope.

- "1 Re-engaging the dismissed men so that discussion could proceed.
- 2 A proposal for work sharing on a rota basis - "Rotamation".
- 3 A consideration that financial compensation be paid on the basis of making up the difference between unemployment benefit and the level of the Consolidated Time Rate.

- 4 A redundancy procedure for future redundancies with adequate prior consultation and longer periods of notice.
- 5 Assurances on the re-employment of discharged workers". 202

The request for reinstatement and the demand for worksharing were flatly refused. The undertaking on re-employment was reiterated, as was the companies view of the recession. The only new dimension which had been raised neither by the local officials or the shop stewards, was the suggestion put forward by Harry Nicholas for financial compensation for those dismissed. Ambrose, of the AEU, had no mandate to discuss such a claim and neither of the craft unions representatives took part in the exchanges on this item. The main stumbling block was not the policies of the craft unions but the position of the Federation. Hope presented the EEF objections.

"....although theoretically ex-gratia payments were matters for individual concerns, in practice, if a very large concern like the British Motor Corporation acted unilaterally it would be bound to prejudice the position for other federated concerns, some of whom might be faced with the same problem in the near future". 203

Despite the fact that the union leadership now appeared prepared to abandon a 'no redundancy' policy, it still did not meet with the consent of the BMC management. Reinstatement was refused on grounds that the Corporation was now operating on a reduced production programme. Work sharing was denounced as impractical. The view of the employers was,

"....the only economic propositions in the interests of the firm and the remainder of the employees was redundancy". 204

Compensation was ruled out because of the implications it held for member firms in the Federation. Neither the EEF nor BEC wished to see a company like BMC creating a precedent for compensation,

where the mass of smaller firms lacking the resources of the Corporation would not have the same ability to pay. Even on the question of a redundancy procedure agreement for the future, the EEF wanted this left to the local Conference. Though they would encourage member firms to give early notification of redundancies, such decisions were at the discretion of individual employers. Even though the national officials did not appear to be directly challenging managerial prerogative, and despite the clear abandonment of a 'no redundancy' demand even on the part of the AEU leadership, the terms of the union leaderships acceptance for redundancy stood at variance to the positions held by both the BMC and the EEF. It was therefore the approach of the employers as much ^{as} the demands from the workplace, which was forcing the national union leaders to take a position on their own somewhat unclear proposals on redundancy. A meeting of the union leaderships was called for the 10 July to examine what kind of "action in the factories" ²⁰⁵ could be taken in response to the views of the employers.

Discontent and occasional stoppages continued to be expressed during the week after the dismissed workers had left the works. The selection of redundancies, on a "last in - first out" basis across sections, gave rise to considerable anomalies. Workers with 20 years service had been dismissed with little more than a days notice. Dick Etheridge gave an example of a man with 31 years service at Austin being made redundant, but the following week a woman had been put on his job, while others with less than a years' employment at Longbridge had escaped dismissal, ^{& where} a large number of new workers had been recruited on certain sections. ²⁰⁶ Regardless, however, the workplace leadership, not unaware of the discontent, stuck to its central strategy - an official dispute, despite or perhaps

even because of, the failure of the employers to produce concessions.

On the 6 July, after a series of sectional meetings at Longbridge, the JSSC restated its call for official action rather than take an independent initiative. Dick Etheridge said,

"The management refusal of our demands were not received pleasantly but the feeling in the works is that this matter is of such a magnitude, that any action should be united and with the leadership of the officials". 207

P Fiet, the acting chairman of the Austin stewards, in the absence of Varnom who was attending a conference in France, said,

"No one wants a strike but we are all looking to our officials for a lead". 208

On the 9 July, a meeting of 750 shop stewards in the motor industry organised by the 'Big Five', called for an official stoppage across the whole of the motor industry. The meeting of 14 unions NE's in London, decided on the 10 July to respond to the workplace demands, and

"This meeting recommends to all Executive Councils that notice be given to the British Motor Corporation that, in the event of their continued refusal, either to reinstate the 6,000 dismissed workers or to afford adequate compensation and to give assurances of full consultation in the future all labour will be withdrawn from British Motor Corporation factories on and from 23 July 1956". 209

A series of telephone conversations between the national union representatives and the BMC senior management had failed to move the approach of the Corporation. A press statement issued by the company said,

"This action is yet another profoundly disturbing example of trade unionism at National level. We have in mind recent union action at Rolls Royce, Hawker Aircraft and Norton Motors. In all these cases, as in our own, official strikes have been declared before the Procedure agreed in the industry between the Engineering and Allied Employers Federation, of which the firm concerned are members, and the trade unions have been exhausted". 210

In a reference to the 'Big Five' the statement went on,

"the British Motor Corporation feel that the union executives have yielded to pressure from certain elements who do not represent the views of the vast majority of the workpeople concerned". 211

While neither side expected the BMC strike to have 100 per cent support, it remained unclear to what extent the national union leadership could command the allegiance of the membership. The strike, due to begin on the 23 July was only five days away from the complete closure of the BMC for the now agreed annual holiday fortnight. It was also almost three weeks after the actual redundancies. Furthermore, there was considerable emphasis in the local and national press to the stocks of unsold cars which were the result of the recession in the industry. For the existing workforce, the union leadership was asking its union membership to begin a national all out strike, not only five days before their holidays but after a period of 5½ months short time working. Furthermore, the actual impact of the redundancy was unevenly experienced across the combine. There were 3,000 redundancies among the 20,000 Austin workers but none among the Corporation's 5,000 employees in Coventry, where the highest levels of unionisation existed, whereas in Oxford, union membership was often low outside the craft areas. The operation of the "last in - first out" selection for redundancy, however, did not discriminate between union and non-union workers; it therefore did not offer protection to anti-union workers. The initial response of both the Government and the employers to the strike call appeared to be one of being prepared to ride-it-out on the expectation of it having only limited support. While there was some grounds for taking such a view, both these parties became alarmed at the prospect of the conflict spilling over beyond the motor industry as support began to be expressed in other industries for the BMC workers.

The managements' early suggestions were that the strike would be ignored by as much as 80 per cent of workforce.²¹² On the 11 July, nearly 900 signatures had been collected at Morris Motors, Oxford, opposing the strike call.²¹³ Even at the Metal Products plant in Birmingham, 90 vehicle builders in the paint shop held a section meeting and opposed the strike. Across in Coventry at the Morris Engines plant, the AEU members from the toolroom voted against the strike call. In the Foundry section however, 550 of the TGWU walked out to hold a meeting to consider their position. They voted to strike.²¹⁴ This fragmented response, with the implication of a revolt from the rank and file against the union leadership, began to turn with the setting up of Central Dispute Committees. These were manned by the local full time officials plus delegates from the individual workplace strike committees. The most important central disputes committee was based on Birmingham, where 70 per cent of the BMC workforce was employed. Here the chairman was Jack Williams, the Engineering Trade Group Secretary of the TGWU. At Longbridge, the immediate response of the workplace organisation to the strike call was the establishing of a network of strike committees covering Transport, Information, Legal Advice, Propaganda, Finance, and Picket Duties.²¹⁵ In Coventry, the central disputes committee decided to hold a series of factory gate meetings at the city's BMC plants in order to generate support. On the 20 July, it was being reported that less than a-third of workers were attending these addresses.²¹⁶ In Oxford, on the Friday before the beginning of the strike, a meeting at Morris Radiators was attended by less than one in ten of the factories manual workforce,²¹⁷ while at the Tractor and Transmissions plant in Birmingham, the shop stewards in the AEU had held a ballot of their membership and discovered that 60 per cent were opposed to the strike in the toolroom and a five to

one ratio among the plants union membership, had decided against the strike call.²¹⁸

The management's move to weaken support was to offer all of their labour force a full days wage for Monday 23 July. Since the redundancy plants on a four day week had not worked Mondays, this invite offered,

"All men who turn up for work will be found a job and will be paid. If disorganisation of production means that they cannot do their normal work then alternative work will be provided for them".²¹⁹

In what was now being described as the most important dispute in the post war period, the Corporations management were claiming that 53 per cent of their labour force was working during the first day of the strike. Over 23,200 day shift workers out of a total of 43,500 in 12 factories were claimed to be at work.²²⁰ These figures confirmed the weaknesses in workplace organisation. At the MG factory in Abingdon, H Cook, the local secretary of the NUVB, was the only member of the workforce on strike.²²¹ Morris Radiators were claiming a 90 per cent attendance, while Morris Cars claimed 85 per cent of workforce had clocked in.²²² Support for the unions was stronger in the Midlands but even at Longbridge the works management said that only one if five workers were not at work.²²³ A similar proportion was in at SU Carburettors. Among the other Birmingham plants, the management reported a-third of the Morris Commercial, two-thirds of the Metal Products and only a quarter of the Tractor and Transmissions factories supported the stoppage.²²⁴ It was in Coventry where the loyalty towards the unions was most vividly expressed, despite the fact that no redundancies had been issued among the city's BMC factories. Four out of five of those employed in the Morris Engines plant, and nine out of ten workers in the Morris

Bodies factory were on strike.²²⁵ The strike in fact had its greatest support from the body shops where traditionally a high proportion of NUVB, SMW and AEU memberships were employed. Besides Morris Bodies, less than five per cent of the workforce in the Fisher Ludlow body plants at Birmingham and Coventry had crossed union picket lines.²²⁶

After the first day, the strike organisers began to look towards ways of strengthening their position. At Longbridge, the workplace organisation announced plans for the stationing of 1,000 pickets at the Austin works. The AEU issued an instruction to all its members to refuse to handle work of any kind for BMC plants. The effect of this upon the supply of axles, cables, and other car accessories would begin to be felt on the assembly lines within days. Openshaw, the unions president, said on the opening day of the strike,

"This is a major job and we are going to do everything to win it. The strike is strengthening in spite of reports of the men drifting into work. It will be so complete within a few days that it will not be any use anybody trying to work. I think that by the end of the week we shall have stopped all work designed for BMC.... Production cannot go on very long because work on the line depends on another and the difficulties will be so insurmountable that it will not be worth while opening the works".²²⁷

Meanwhile, the national leadership of the TGWU issued instructions to the Docks, Road Transport, and the Railway Unions to "black" all movement of BMC goods and supplies. Even bus drivers on Midland Red and Birmingham Corporation, withdrew transport to the Longbridge works.²²⁸

On the second day of the dispute, Morris Radiators completely stopped after Malcolm Young the works convenor arrived in the works. Despite

the fact that the works was only about 40 per cent organised, after a canteen meeting, 90 per cent of the workforce went on strike; a large number of who joined the TGWU, who were making immediate payments of dispute benefit.²²⁹ By the third day, the effects of the strike were spreading beyond BMC. The assembly lines stopped at Press Steel as the workforce walked out in support of BMC workers. At Jensen Motors in West Bromwich, 300 walked out after a disagreement over the blacking of BMC work. The Coventry Hood and Sidescreen Company gave notice of redundancy owing to shortages of supplies from BMC. The Lockheed Hydraulic Brake Company went on a 3 day week and British Piston Ring declared a redundancy. More serious in its implications, 12,000 Ford workers went on strike over managements refusal to withdraw redundancy notices to 2,000 workers whose jobs were affected by the shortages from Fisher Ludlow. Jack Mitchell, the convenor at the Briggs plant and a member of the 'Big Five' Steering Committee was quoted as saying,

"It is a 100 per cent strike. The men are determined to fight this one to the finish. There principle is 'one out the lot out' ".²³⁰

By the end of the first week, clashes were being reported at Cowley and Longbridge where picket lines had been organised. But for the employers, in general, and the Government, the most alarming aspect was the rapid escalation of the area of conflict. Component manufacturers were having to lay off workers, Standard management announced the possibility of making another 1,000 redundant because of the loss of bodies from Fisher Ludlow. On the 31 July, the NUR circulated instructions to its 1,670 branches not to handle any goods either to or from BMC factories. A spokesman for the union, commenting on the union decision to back the engineering unions said,

"This is an official dispute which could have a very decided affect on organised trade unionists not only in the motor car industry but in every sector of the industrial field".²³¹

The movement of coal and steel to the BMC foundaries had come to a complete halt. On the 30 July, the fear of a national dock strike, arising out of sympathy actions taken in support of official union instructions, began to loom. The National Association of Port Employers issued a statement describing the dockers embargo of BMC goods as,

"a gross break of mutual understanding in the docks industry". 232

The prospect of a stoppage arising out of disciplinary actions by the employers, under the provisions of the dock labour scheme, was only compounded by the employers in the engineering industry asking for advice from the EEF over the refusal of union members in the components industry to handle BMC orders. Within two days of the start of the dispute with the Corporation, the Federation was advising caution. On the 25 July, the following policy was being advocated by the EEF to its constituent members.

"1 Where management was notified of their workpeoples refusal to carry out BMC work, the firm should take every opportunity of questioning whether the men were acting wisely in view of the fact that some 50 per cent of the BMC's own employees thought so little of the dispute that they were remaining at work.

2 If, as was likely, the workers concerned stated that they were acting under union instructions, firms should as far as possible, minimise the effect of any action taken by their workpeople rather than maximise it.

3 Thus although workpeople who refuse to carry out certain work would technically be on strike, they should wherever possible be found other work.

Similarly workpeople laid idle in the establishment as a result of a refusal by other workers to carry out BMC work should themselves be found alternative work if this is practicable.

All this assumes that the workers are reasonable in their attitudes.

4 If, despite every effort, it was not found

possible to provide alternative work for those laid idle in an establishment where workplace were refusing to carry out BMC work, the guarantee would be waived : a refusal to carry out work being tantamount to strike action".²³³

Caution, with the prospect of escalating the conflict within the engineering industry, was matched by a fear of the dispute having repercussions and other sectors of the economy. At the end of the first week, The Economist commented,

"....support for the strike grows dangerously among other workers such as railwaymen".²³⁴

Even with the divided support from the workforces in BMC, the strike was having a significant impact upon the employers. Apart from the blacking of BMC work outside the Corporation in the workplace, the management faced an increasing burden of finding productive employment for those workers who crossed the picket lines. At the Morris plants in Oxford, where three quarters of the labour force were regularly clocking in, less than 40 per cent of normal production was being achieved.²³⁵ At Austin, little more than a quarter of normal production was obtained from nearly three quarters of the labour force.²³⁶

The beginning of the two weeks annual holiday if anything, saw the organisation of the strike become more effective. No essential maintenance work took place. The restrictions upon the movements of BMC imports and exports became virtually complete. The factory strike committees and the Central Disputes Committees held daily meetings to develop ways of tightening their hold over the Corporation. Speakers were despatched across the country to help reinforce support for the stoppage. From the activities of the hardship fund, it is clear that an increasing number of non unionists or workers whose

union membership had lapsed were beginning to join the dispute.

On the third day of the strike it became apparent that the employers were prepared to make concessions. The Management Board of the Federation met on the 26 July and decided,

- "1 The British Motor Corporation are prepared to discuss locally the form of consultation in the event of redundancy.
- 2 The Federation are still prepared to consider on a national basis any views which the Confederation may wish to advise on the general question of redundancy including the question of notice and other considerations of those displaced".²³⁷

It was not until the first week of the holidays that the MOL moved in, to respond to what was viewed as a more conciliatory response on the part of the employers. For the Ministry, the concern was that with the strike having started a "war of attrition" would result in other sections of the labour movement becoming involved. BMC management were clearly under pressure over their handling of the redundancies. Neither Parliamentary opinion nor press comment gave much comfort to the Corporation, and even views among the EEF appeared to be divided.²³⁸

On the 31 July, the Chief Industrial Commissioner, Sir Wilfred Neden, called in both sides for discussions. On the issue of consultation before redundancy, the management side were already conceding that the unions were "pushing at an open door". The obstacle was compensation. The Federation opposed this being resolved under duress with the BMC. For the union leadership, however, this was not a topic for lengthy discussions at national level. Harry Nicholas of the TGWU stated their case.

"The strike is against BMC not the Federation.... we are not prepared to meet the National Federation on compensation.

We do not want the question to be influenced by what the backyard foundaries can pay compared with what people with the finances of BMC can pay. We maintain that the question of compensation for redundancy is a matter to be dealt with by us with the firm concerned, unless and until there is a national agreement. Having regard to the protracted negotiations which are always necessary to arrive at a national agreement we cannot wait that length of time to deal with the problem of 6,000 men dismissed by BMC. This dispute is about the way they should be dealt with".239

Leading the union side at the MOL talks, Harry Brotherton informed the Commissioner that,

"....he had not formulated any exact mathematical ideas of what should happen". 240

but went on to say of the National leaderships commitment to the struggle with BMC,

"The unions would rather go down with the wreckage than stand the horrible state of affairs that existed".241

The union leaderships which previously had been unwilling to agreed to actively support the defence of the NUVB over McHugh, who had been divided and uncertain at Standard, were now shaken by the poor state of organisation in the motor industry. To lose yet again on the question of redundancy, could only have catastrophic consequences for union membership. The BMC strike witnessed both an enforced unity from within both left and right wing sections of the engineering unions and a far more assertive position being taken by the TGWU, which appeared to be making a marked break from the Arthur Deakin period. On Friday, the 10 August, the basis of an agreement was reached. The terms were,

"It was mutually agreed between the employers and the unions:

- 1 There shall be a resumption of work at all BMC factories next week, commencing Monday, 13 August 1956.

- 2 There shall be no victimisation by either side, and all employees shall return to work on the terms and conditions prevailing prior to the dispute.
- 3 The BMC agreed that joint re-examination of the redundancies shall proceed locally at individual establishments.
- 4 The BMC report their undertaking to offer re-employment to their ex-employees in appropriate vacancies which may arise.
- 5 In the special circumstances of this redundancy the Engineering Employers Federation have recommended, and the BMC have agreed to make, payments in lieu of longer notice to certain of the dismissed employees on the following basis,
 - A To Employees of three years continuous service, a further week's pay at appropriate consolidated time rates.
 - B To employees of ten years or more, continuous service, two further week's pay at appropriate consolidated time rates.
- 6 The method of dealing with any future redundancies which may arise in any of the establishments of the BMC is referred for final settlement locally". 242

The final negotiations lasted 15 hours. The main area of contention were the details surrounding compensation. The unions failed to gain compensation for all redundant workers, while the management would not discuss the final details until the decision had been made to call off the strike.

These agreements saw the eclipse of the 'right to work' policies of the 'Big Five' shop stewards. The unity of the CSEU leadership had forced the hand of the employers on the question of consultation over redundancy. In exchange for an involvement in job loss, the union leaderships had accepted compensation for jobs rather than 'no redundancy'. It was the effectiveness of the union leaderships, both nationally and at local level, which had usurped the workplace organisation. In contrast, the experience of Standard, the national

union officials were willing to engage in a national stoppage with one of the most important employers in the Federation despite the weaker state of union membership in the Corporation. Unlike the powerfully organised Standard possessing, for the motor industry, a remarkable level of internal workplace unity, at BMC it was the district officials rather than the workplace organisation which controlled the strike through the formation of the Central Disputes Committees, set up in Coventry, Birmingham and Oxford. Local officials were not only able to hold the workplace organisation in obedience, but the weak position of union membership and the general state of organisation in the plants, placed the workplace leaderships firmly under the authority of officialdom, even to the point of discouraging stoppages not having the authorisation of the full time officials. It was the local officials and not the combine committee which brought co-ordination to the strike. At Longbridge, the DO of the NUVB, Jack Gardiner, along with officials from the TGWU led the mass sit-down on the picket lines which prevented supplies reaching Longbridge. For the union side, the dispute highlighted a serious imbalance in organisation. The strike had been strongest in areas like Coventry, where despite the absence of redundancy, the membership had supported the national union leadership. Support was visibly weaker in Oxford and Birmingham where considerable areas of non union labour were employed. Moreover the stoppage was most complete among the skilled memberships. It was in the body shops in particular, where the NUVB and the SMW were the heirs to a craft tradition, and in the machine shops where the apprenticed engineers displayed a discipline and a loyalty to union leadership. However, it was among the largely unorganised semi skilled track workers and among those indirect workers where organisational weaknesses were starkly revealed. It was in these areas, that the new assertive TGWU was to

make its biggest inroads in the post strike period.

That the union officials had controlled the strike, did not detract from the work that had been put in by the workplace organisation. Such activities firmly subordinated to the authority of the officials. It was the workplace leadership which was to lead the triumphant return to work. On the 13 August, at the end of the 19 day dispute, a mass meeting held at Grass Field in Birmingham on a wet Monday morning, heard Dick Etheridge present a new confident and defiant challenge to management. Addressing the meeting he said,

"They (the works management) say they are going to let us know when to return through the medium of the press. That is not the way we are going to be treated. The terms of the agreement are quite explicit : 'to return to work on the normal working day which is Monday, 13 August'. This is Monday isn't it? We will march into the works whether they want us to or not. Sections will break off at their normal working places and the works committee will see the management and get this sorted out. Agreed?" 243

The meeting concluded by giving three cheers for the local officials.

As the returning strikers marched through the Birmingham streets towards the entrance of the East Works, they sang a victory song which had been specially written by Arthur Burgess, a grinder from the machine shop and an active member of the picket committee. In a parody of 'Marching through Georgia' they sang his lyrics, copies of which had been distributed by the Austin Strike Committee.

"Now the Battle's over and victory has been won
We'll keep alive our unity and the bosses on the run
Let us stand together be proud of what we've won
While are marching to victory.

Hurrah! Hurrah! We've beat the BMC
Hurrah! Hurrah! We've workers and we're free"244

As they entered the works, through the CAB section and marched down

towards the West Works, there was a constant clanging of metal against the machines keeping time to the mass singing.²⁴⁵ The hilarity continued throughout the morning as a rejuvenated membership celebrated their success.

Both the Standard and the BMC redundancy strikes, marked a distinctive break in the approach of organised labour towards redundancy in a market economy. This change was not without implications for workplace organisation in the motor industry. On the 7 July, in a debate in the House of Commons on Government Economic policy it became apparent that both the main political parties had accepted that 'full employment' did not mean that every worker had an inalienable right to remain in his present job. During the course of the debate, Harold MacMillan, as Chancellor of the Exchequer, said,

"It is clear that we should avoid under-employment or concealed under-employment in the industries which have lost their markets, when at the same time, there is severe labour shortage in industries which are still expanding".²⁴⁶

Given the acceptance of unemployment as a necessary requirement in a labour market, the lesson to be drawn from the Standard and BMC disputes lay not in a disagreement over the objective of employer policy, the shedding of labour, but rather from the consequences of the means for achieving such a reduction. The Economist, for example, in a critical assessment of the BMC strike argued,

"By becoming the first motor company to let go of its workers promptly BMC has struck a blow for swift mobility but by giving notice to its men so busquely and flooding the labour exchanges after so little warning, when it knew well before hand that the dismissals could not be avoided, it has done real harm to the cause of confidence in industrial relations".²⁴⁷

The main danger regarding the question of redundancy, it suggested, lay in the Standard.

"The dismissed workers at Standard who had continued at their work benches for some weeks while under notice, had threatened to stir up strikes in resistance to the sackings - and the unions had done little to discourage them". 248

The main achievements of the BMC dispute, however, were,

"The unions now appear to be ready to lay rather more emphasis on bargaining for higher severance pay and rather less on demonstrations against the fact of redundancies - a policy that they should have accepted from the start. This change in the unions attitude could be a significant turning point in the whole psychological struggle for labour redeployment". 249

For the union leaderships, the price of this transformation was offset by the partial gains in compensation and an employer commitment to consultation over redundancies. The achievements from the strikes were even acknowledged as being modest. In his opening address at the 1956 Annual Conference of the CSEU, Harry Brotherton set out what he saw as the main implications of the BMC dispute. What had been achieved had come about through what he described as an "awareness of unity of purpose" among the 15 unions which had been involved. He went on to say,

"Every reasonable step must be taken to minimise the difficulties which redundancy created. Consultation should take place with union officials on whether the problem would be permanent or temporary and whether it could be best met by short-time working or dismissals". 250

He went on,

"If a permanent reduction in the labour force were needed it might be achieved merely by halting recruitment. Employees and the Ministry of Labour should be given the largest possible notice. Governments should provide subsistence for those who had to take jobs in another area. Workers with any length of service should have the right to compensation. This is no revolutionary idea, for compensation was paid to managerial and professional employees and the idea was not so ambitious as American union requests for a guaranteed annual wage". 251

The Journal saw the importance of the strike not so much in what

had been achieved but rather in what had been prevented - the exercise of summary dismissals and mass unemployment.

"The greatest victory is not the question of consultation or the very real concessions of compensation but in what we prevented the employers from doing. We were fighting a defensive battle to stop the employers and government from creating a pool of unemployment which they could use as an instrument to attack our wages and conditons". 252

In the workplace assessment of the strike, John Barker, a NUVB shop steward at Longbridge, emphasised the role of the union officials. Writing in The Journal he said,

"We could not close without a word of thanks for our officials who achieved our joint demands. Consultation before redundancy. Compensation if redundancy should occur - all these things add up to a brighter future for our children when they have to go out to earn a living".253

On the 26 September 1956, almost identical procedure agreements were signed by the local CSEU officials and the works managements at Standard and all the BMC plants.

The redundancy procedure sought to involve simultaneously both the senior shop stewards and the local trade union officials in the operations of redundancies. While the procedure, for the first time, acknowledged the status of senior stewards in the BMC workplace organisation, any objectives to the redundancy from within the workplace would have to be taken up by the local officials. The main content of the procedure was the time scale for dismissal within which management could outline their reasons for redundancies. Apart from enhancing the position of senior stewards, through the procedure operating through the leadership of the workplace organisation, the redress of individual workers could only be remedy through union representatives. Thus the procedure agreement itself encouraged a growth in unionisation throughout BMC. Within

the following 12 months, a rapid growth in union membership was being reported throughout BMC. In April 1957, following a growing shortage of components to the motor industry arising out of the national engineering stoppage large scale redundancies and short time working again threatened the motor industry. On the 2, April The Times reported "Hundreds of workers in the Oxford area are applying for trade union membership".²⁵⁴ On the 3 July, strikes broke out on various sections at Morris Motors against the presence of non-union labour. In a matter of days, 14 sections reported 100 per cent organisation and a further 8 had nearly complete unionisation.²⁵⁵ At Morris Radiators, the convenor Malcolm Young claimed,

".....great strides have been made to secure a 100 per cent factory. Several departments and sections have secured 100 per cent organisation whilst the majority of the remainder have almost reached their aim".²⁵⁶

A similar story was being revealed at Morris Commercial in Birmingham.

A report in The Clarion, the combine paper, claimed,

"Organisation in the factory growing very quickly, a very high percentage now in the union.... attempts to get an 'official' works committee".²⁵⁷

At Longbridge, reports from sections immediately after the big strike were stating a refusal of trade unionists to work with 'Nonners'.

In the North Works, for example, the works committee heard,

"Feelings running high against non strikers... averting victimisation according to the agreement".²⁵⁸

In the West Press Shop, the management had been given until mid-day to put two 'scabs' on a machine of their own. The issue was settled by both joining a union. In the West Body Shop, vehicle builders who had crossed the picket lines had been suspended by the NUVB. The policy adopted by the Austin JSSC attempted to accord with the

no victimisation pledges in the strike agreement. The conduct of individual members during the strike were left to the authority of the union. For non union labour, the workplace organisation relied upon the consequences of non-representation. On the 5 September 1956, 22 redundancy notices were served by the works management. Twenty one of these were reported to the JSSC as being "nonners", while the other workers involved had been a "non-strike". The Committee agreed to take no action on the redundant workers' behalf.²⁵⁹ By the Autumn of 1957, the Longbridge workforce had increased by 2,000. Towards the end of the year, the works was moving towards 100 per cent organisation. The works management, though they acknowledged the position of senior steward in regard to the redundancy procedure, increasingly found it difficult to refuse the attendance of workplace representatives at meetings held with local officials, when problems arising out of redundancy were being discussed. The interpretation of the redundancy procedure increasingly relied upon the knowledge of the senior stewards.²⁶⁰ Disputes surrounding seniority, due to the transfer of labour between sections, queries regarding the effect of broken service owing to lay off, through redundancy and strike activity, all complicated the notion of continuous service as the criteria of determining seniority for redundancy selection. It became a highly contentious term. It was, increasingly, the senior stewards rather than the local officials upon which consistent and equitable solutions were sought.

During 1958, the JSSC began to demand full recognition for the Works Committee. On being returned yet again as convenor, Dick Etheridge, in his address to the Annual Meeting on the 6 January 1958, concluded his speech by saying,

"....that we had got to develop an organisation which was united and authoritative. We had reached the point

where the management were prepared to recognise the works committee and this issue would be the first commitment of the incoming committee. It was obvious that the management would expect it to be a responsible and effective committee. The chairman and secretary had got to attend a meeting with the Confederation Committee on Thursday, 9 January, to outline our proposals and get the officials to agree with us in regard to a factory procedure". 261

In June 1958, the Works Committee advised the membership that as the works was now virtually a closed shop, they should be in possession of an up-to-date card as sections might not accept transferred labour before cards had been inspected.²⁶² This increasing organised power in the workplace was not unnoticed by the works management. From 1958 onwards, the incidence of meetings between senior stewards and the General Works Manager was averaging a meeting a week.²⁶³

But as the workplace leadership attempted to extend what was virtually de facto recognition into full recognition of the Works Committee, the main obstacle came from the local union officials rather than management itself.

The growing voluntary relationship between the works management and the workplace leadership at Austin had developed not just out of the increasing demands which arose out of the problems of reorganisation of work and the transfers of labour, but it also occurred in a period of growing sectional militancy and stoppages in a rapidly expanding product market. Between 1956 and 1960, the annual production of cars doubled, to top 1.3 million.²⁶⁴ This rapid growth in output was closely related to the development of a more aggressive form of sectional bargaining. During the first six months of 1959, 84 strikers were reported in the motor industry, 13 unofficial strikes took place at Morris Motors, Oxford.²⁶⁵ At Longbridge, the works management turned increasingly to the convenor and the senior stewards, rather than the local officials, for immediate solutions.

On Wednesday, the 15 July 1959, however, following a spate of such stoppages, the chief steward of the TGWU at the Morris Motors plant in Oxford, Frank Horsman, was instantly dismissed following an accusation by the supervision, supported by two workers, that he had encouraged a stoppage of work in protest against overtime payments. The trouble had been building up for a period of time on a number of sections on the assembly tracks. Lost time during the normal shift, through mechanical breakdowns or the lack of supplies to the track, resulted in what the workforce saw as overtime being paid at the day rate until the basic hours of production had been fulfilled. Horsman was escorted to the gate. The dismissal caused a major rift in the Oxford plant. Considerable friction already existed between the AEU, the largest union and the TGWU. In the more recent period, accusations of poaching of members by the TGWU had become a source of conflict between the local union officials. In the workplace, the TGWU did not participate in the JSSC, nor was it consequently, involved in the BMC Combine Committee. The TGWU called for a meeting of the workplace organisation but found that the AEU stewards were not prepared to support them on this issue. The following day Jack Longworth, the Oxford AEU DO, received a telephone call from Jack Thomas, the local TGWU DO, informing him that the dismissal would not be put into procedure as this would not get a reinstatement. The TGWU had called a meeting of all their stewards and membership and also invited AEU stewards at which they called for a walk out of the factory at 10.00am on Friday, 16 July. That evening the AEU DC met. It decided,

"That this District Committee views that the dismissal of any shop steward because of an alleged over stepping of his functions without a full investigation by both the company and the trade union officials is very provocative, therefore, we morally support any AEU member who decides to withdraw his/her labour during the present dispute".266

It then called on the EC to give immediate support should the TGWU EC make the dispute official. A series of sectional disputes involving the TGWU at Morris Motors, had caused a loss of earnings for AEU members during the previous month. As a result, the leaving of the decision to strike to the initiative of the individual workers completely split not just the support for the chief steward but also the membership of the AEU.

The BMC Combine Committee, following a private meeting between Les Gure and Frank Cousins and Jack Jones, was called together for Monday, 20 July. A packed meeting of stewards met at Transport House in Birmingham. Before the meeting got underway, there was an objection from the floor to the presence of full time officials on the platform of a Combine meeting. The officials, contrary to the views of the combine leadership, took their place among the main body of the meeting.²⁶⁷ The meeting recommended,

"That this meeting of the BMC shop stewards deplore the action of BMC management in sacking Bro Horsman and therefore pledge 100 per cent support for direct action in all BMC plants whenever a shop steward is victimised or sacked".²⁶⁸

Though this largely resulted in financial support and the blacking of work into Oxford from the rest of the Corporation, in Oxford itself, some of the AEU membership came out in support. On the 20 July, a special AEU DC was held at which the Morris AEU stewards were invited. The EC had not made a decision. This meeting resolved,

"The Morris Cars AEU shop stewards together with AEU members are placed in an invidious position in that the TGWU have officially withdrawn their labour from the factory following the dismissal of their chief shop steward Bro F Horsman.

We urge EC to give urgent consideration to position with the view to instructing our members to withdraw their labour". ²⁶⁹

The AEU EC were not willing to give support to their membership withdrawing their labour on an issue which had not been put into procedure. The two most important outcomes of the Horsman case, apart from the fact the the chief steward never got his job back, was firstly, an attempt by workplace organisations in BMC to seek procedures governing a dismissal which involved a shop steward and secondly, a move on the part of the AEU to clamp down on the activities of combine committees.

At Longbridge, as the incidence of strikes began to rise, the works management increasingly looked towards a committee which could co-ordinate activity in the workplace. It was even prepared to consider a three stage proposal from the Austin works committee which would offer protection for shop stewards from arbitrary dismissal. Though this development had the full backing of Jack Williams ^{of} the TGWU, who had now become the local CSEU DS, it was actually turned down by the officials of the Foundry Workers, Sheet Metal Unions, AEU, UPA, NUVB, and the woodcutting machinists.²⁷⁰

For the local officials of the craft unions, the opposition was based upon the view that their own organisations could protect their own memberships. Others argued issues governing stewards should be left to the authority and powers of the union concerned rather than upon a workplace organisation comprising of mixed memberships. Even the TGWU, though they were prepared to discuss the issue of a procedure for 'protection', they would have nothing to do with a proposal which had the word 'dismissal' contained in it.²⁷¹ For the Austin works committee, the procedure being based upon the senior stewards in the workplace would allow an issue like the dismissal of Horsman to be raised immediately. This, it was considered might provide a greater possibility for finding a resolution before the case went outside the

factory to the local officials after the steward had been removed from the workplace.

However, it was the actions of the Combine Committee in calling for a strike, and the behaviour of the AEU combine shop stewards at Cowley which, in the context of a growing number of strikes, led to an attempt on the part of the AEU and later the TUC itself to restrict the activities of inter plant contacts. On the 11 August 1959, in the middle of the Horsman dispute, The Times devoted a leader to the state of industrial relations in the industry.

"Labour relations", it claimed, "in sections of the motor industry are deplorable and getting worse". 272

The response of the AEU was the circulation of all its DC's to instruct the shop stewards under their jurisdiction not to attend meetings called by bodies not under the direct authority of the union constitution. The circular read,

"Your committee is hereby instructed that all AEU shop stewards within the area or the jurisdiction of your District Committee shall be instructed that they must not participate.... The Executive Council must impress upon all District Committee and shop stewards their decision that the conference as referred to in this circular and all conferences of a similar character which are not provided for in our constitution must not be attended or supported in any way by our members". 273

A copy of the letter was to be attached to all DC minutes and reported to every branch. The conference which was being promoted as a National Conference of shop stewards and Aircraft Workers, due to be held in London on 8 November, but the ban also covered a conference called to discuss redundancy and the protection of shop stewards and sponsored by the workplace organisations from BMC, Fords, Briggs and Forth Brown, arranged for December in Sheffield.

The ban was challenged by a number of DC's, who claimed the action of the EC itself was unconstitutional.²⁷⁴ On the 17 November, Austin-Firth Brown called off its conference. However, both Les Gurl, and Geo. Caborn the convenor of Firth Brown were suspended from holding office for twelve months. The letter from the AEU EC stated,

"Having regard to your unconstitutional conduct of wilfully acting contrary to the rules and the constitution of our union EC has decided that you are suspended from holding a shop stewards' position for a period of twelve months and the DC is being instructed accordingly".²⁷⁵

Caborn attempted unsuccessfully to defend his position by stating he was acting in his capacity of CSEU shop steward. This was followed by an inquiry conducted by the TUC into disputes and workplace representation. It specifically named both the BMC combine and the December 1959 conference and implicitly attacked the role of the Communist Party. In a reference to Combine Committees part of the report published in September 1960, read,

"Whatever the motive of those primarily responsible ... the effect is often a challenge to established union arrangements. For some years it has been a policy of disruptive political bodies to try and form national organisations of stewards. This does not mean that political considerations were uppermost when all the organisations of this type were formed : some of the sponsors and many of the present participants probably regard them as supplementing established union methods not as competing with them. Nonetheless, cases of muddle, duplication and even conflict have arisen through those bodies acting as though they were independent of union obligations (whether within a union, between unions, or between unions and employers)".²⁷⁶

The report went on to say,

"Where disproportionate power in the workplace lies with the employer the worker must look to national institutions to redress the balance".²⁷⁷

The report warned unions to be more vigilant and be prepared to discipline stewards for breaches in rules or agreements which

resulted in "needless strikes". Throughout 1960, the motor industry was hit by both a wave of disputes and increased redundancy and short time working. It was not so much the power of workplace organisation, but the actions on the shop floor which were challenging not just the authority of union officials, but the influence of the shop steward leaderships.

On the issue of redundancy, despite holding to a policy of 'no redundancy' the BMC combine committee had been largely subordinate to the authority of the local union officials. It never, however, even with the joint consultation and compensation established in 1956, came to accept redundancy as inevitable. In October 1956, the BMC delegates in attendance of a 'Big Five' steering committee meeting held in Coventry, criticised both employers and Government for the redundancy strikes but went on to offer only a partial acceptance of what had been achieved at BMC. A composite resolution drawn up for a 'Big Five' conference said,

"Conference welcomes the resistance to redundancy that has already been shown at the BMC, Briggs, Standard and the continuing fight at Nortons. What the conference recognises is that the BMC struggle established a foundation, it must be recognised that our objective is that every worker must receive full wages until suitable alternative work is found". 278

This demand for work or full-maintenance appeared in a conference resolution to fight redundancy and short time working. Its four main parts were,

- "A Retention of all workers on the pay roll until suitable employment can be found.
- B That the traditional right of all workers to draw unemployment benefit while on short time be restored.
- C That the fight for the 40 hour week without loss of pay be stepped up and that a shorter working week as the situation warrants it be also fought for.

D And full support be given to the Confederation's claim for a substantial pay increase". 279

On the 10 November 1956, the Steering Committee discussed reports from the factories, on how redundancy and short time were to be resisted; that despite procedures and prior consultation the committee agreed that what mattered was the power of the workplace organisation. The minute reads,

".....it was agreed that in most cases the strength of the workers on the floor of the factory decided what policy was accepted". 280

In 1958, redundancies at Daimler and Rover both resulted in compensation after a period of consultation, but in 1959 and 1960, there was much greater resistance to attempts by management to enforce redundancy or challenge workplace organisation. At Standard, the management, in June, dismissed 120 vehicle builders for refusing to accept the rate being offered.²⁸¹ At the body plant of Willenhall Motors, a six week strike by 600 NUVB members broke out over the redundancy of 55 vehicle builders, nine of whom were shop stewards.²⁸² In October of 1960, 1,000 workers at Carbodies in Coventry struck over the managements refusal to work a short week to save the jobs of 600 declared redundant.²⁸³ As this strike entered its second week, 700 NUVB workers at Thrupp and Maberly, the Rootes group plant in North London, walked out after the redundancy of 18 trimmers. R Gooding, the Secretary of the Strike Committee, was reported as saying,

"We recognise the crisis in the car industry but we are asking the management to share the existing work until the 18 sacked men find jobs". 284

The strike quickly spread throughout the Rootes group. The management had issued the redundancy notices through the post while the discussions with the NUVB were still in progress. On the 12 October,

the second day of the strike, 10,500 of the company's workforce from its two Coventry plants and the BLSP plant in Acton, joined in sympathy action.²⁸⁵ The strike, for work sharing and not redundancy over the jobs of 18 trimmers, had been organised through a combine committee established at Rootes. The response of the AEU EC was to call on the unions DS's to summon meetings of all AEU shop stewards in Rootes, to make clear that the combine had no constitutional authority under the rules of the union to withdraw labour or issue instructions over blacking. At this summoned meeting of AEU stewards in Coventry, only 35 out of 78 stewards bothered to turn up to hear the reprimand.²⁸⁶

At York, on the 13 October, a meeting of the 15 trade union executives involved refused to recognise the strike until all those on sympathy strike had returned. A meeting of the Rootes stewards in Coventry met to reaffirm their support for work sharing, and would return only if the 18 dismissed workers were reinstated. The advice of the CSEU, which was opposed by the stewards split the workforce. In Coventry, the Stoke plant voted for a return, but over 2,000 Ryton workers, who were almost all vehicle builders voted to stay out, while the Acton and Cricklewood meeting accepted the stewards advice and rejected the proposal of the Confederation officials.²⁸⁷ On the 19 October, all but 650 at Thrupp and Maberly went back, but the following day, 200 store keepers, truck drivers and material handlers walked out when management at Ryton claimed there was no work for 12 indirect workers.²⁸⁸ The London trimmers were eventually given a three week extension of notice and a return to work was finally agreed.

At Rootes, the old divisions had occurred in the commitment of trade groups and individual workplace unions to the question of

redundancy. At the Stoke Engine plant, it was predominantly the TGWU and the AEU who had been most keen to accept a return, but in Ryton the NUVB organised large parts of the assembly while the SMW had their largest Coventry membership at this plant. In the two London plants, it was the highly organised body building workforces which gave the most effective support to the shop stewards opposition to the CSEU. Workplace unity repeatedly co-existed with factory, trade group and sectional interests and divisions as the workplace leadership across the company continually challenged the authority of both management and national union officials. The workplace stewards, under the leadership of the senior stewards, remained openly defiant of officialdom. The resolution for the return to work said,

"Our Committee deplore the action of the CSEU making known their decision without prior consultation with the stewards concerned.

We, the shop stewards of the combine committee of the Rootes group, recommend a return to work at all the establishments in the Rootes Group on Tuesday, 18 October, with the exception of Thrupp and Maberly to enable discussions to take place.

We call on all our members to black all work done by Thrupp and Maberly and to give substantial financial support to our members there.

The Senior shop stewards of the Rootes Group will have no hesitation in withdrawing the labour of their individual factories if a satisfactory settlement is not reached within twenty-one days.

In accordance with the decision of the CSEU at York we call on trade unions concerned to make the strike at Thrupp and Maberly official". 289

Though the Frnak Horsman case saw the first real demonstration of combine action undertaken in opposition to the authority of a national trade union leadership, the complete stoppage at Rootes in opposition to redundancy appeared as a challenge, not just to employer prerogative, but to the authority of the whole CSEU national

leadership. During the 1960 recession, however, redundancy conflict was being contained less by the restraining influence of national trade union officials and more by the actions of works managements.

As the recession deepened during the final quarter of 1960, the annual production of cars tumbled by just over 350,000,²⁹⁰ actual job loss through redundancies remained remarkably light. It was noticeable that in the well organised workplaces of the industry, it was work sharing rather than redundancy which was being forced upon employers. While the number of jobs across the industry did fall by some 50,000 with only a few notable exceptions, this loss was largely accounted for in the component industry.²⁹¹ In the assembly plants, it was at the ailing Standard where a 50 per cent cut in production took place, that 1,700 redundancies were declared out of a 8,000 workforce.²⁹² Employment for the remainder was saved through working a three day week. Again, it was the poorer organised Vauxhall plant at Luton that 1,100 workers were made redundant from a 20,000 workforce, who worked a 4 day week.²⁹³ But among the leading workplace organisation, employers largely chose work sharing rather than confront the shop floor over redundancy. In Coventry for example, 30,000 of the city's car workers were on short time, all factories but Jaguar, whose sales were less volatile to recession, had adopted work sharing.²⁹⁴ This included over 6,000 workers at Rootes. Across in Birmingham, 1,000 Rover workers were on a 4 day week but at SU Carburettors, though 150 TGWU members were on short time, an afternoon shift of women were made redundant.²⁹⁵ But perhaps most significant, in regard to the increased power of workplace organisation, was that at the BMC Birmingham and Oxford plants, though output had been cut by 12½ per cent, there was no mass redundancies.²⁹⁶ Instead, 23,000 of the Corporations 50,000

manual workers were on a 3 or 4 day week.²⁹⁷ It was not that the workplace organisation or their memberships were entirely satisfied with such a situation, but their preference for work sharing as opposed to redundancy appeared sufficient to deter the employer. At the Tractor and Transmissions plant for example, the JSSC issued a leaflet encouraging the workforce to,

"Spread work over a FULL week, not three or even two days. Demand your rights - the Right to Work. The old-fashioned idea of 'If the Gaffer has no work for us what else can he do but lay us off, MUST BE EXPLODED. Even now on short time working more vehicles are being produced than were produced 12 months ago in BMC. Therefore planned production is the obvious answer. This is your Country that we have fought for and many died for, therefore our Rights as Human Beings MUST and shall be the right to a decent standard of living that can only be achieved by the Right to Work and the Right to a Job. When a worker reports for work at the beginning of the day or night shift, it is a grave injustice for him to be sent out after an hour or so after being told NO WORK TODAY. That becomes casual labour, which is a step backwards into the dark past".²⁹⁸

But if the BMC management were having to concede upon their basic prerogative on the determination of the level of their workforce when confronted by power in the workplace, they were also facing a sustained worker offensive. In a period of mass short time, sharply fluctuating earnings, the motor industry employers began to be faced with an alarming increase in stoppages. In 1960, there were 100 strikes of which 67 occurred in Longbridge,²⁹⁹ By 1965, 115 stoppages were recorded in Longbridge³⁰⁰ while in the first six months alone in 1966, 142 strikes had arose at the Morris Motors plant in Oxford.³⁰¹ It was not so much the power of workplace organisation which had become the primary concern of the employers and the national trade union leaderships, but rather the frequent lack of authority which even the leadership in the workplace appeared to have over the membership. With the evident decline of the authority of local union officials, not so much over the workplace

leadership but over the behaviour of the membership on the shop floor, workplace managements in the motor industry increasingly looked towards the role of the senior shop stewards to control the power being exercised by the shop floor. At Longbridge, on the 7 January 1963, the works committee was accorded official recognition by the management with the approval of the local CSEU full time officials.³⁰² This gave legitimate status to the positions of convenor and senior stewards in the national agreements for the operation of procedure. A seven man elected delegation, plus the elected chairman and secretary, would form the negotiating committee for the entire workforce. The agreement stated,

"A problem raised in accordance with the terms of the National agreement dealing with the provisions for the avoidance of disputes which is passed to the shop stewards and not resolved should then be dealt with the chief shop steward of the union concerned. The chief steward shall inform the secretary of the works committee of the nature of the problem and the steps proposed for dealing with it. The chief steward of the union may request the assistance of the secretary of the works committee in negotiations with the management".³⁰³

Under the overall constitutional authority of the CSEU, the works committee agreement for Longbridge was an attempt to both strengthen and unify the authority of the workplace leadership in the midst of growing shop floor dissent. The agreement outlined the basis upon which legitimate access to management was established. It gave the workplace leadership the right to co-opt sectional stewards on to negotiating committees where necessary. Not only did the agreement provide facilities for holding both the monthly meetings of the work committee and the subsequent JSSC in works time, but it established the practice for regular meetings to be held between management and the workplace organisation. By 1965, in the Austin works, meetings between the senior stewards and senior work management were occurring twice a week, a year later it was three meetings a

week.³⁰⁴ More than half of all these meetings involved issues arising out of the body and finishing sections.³⁰⁵ Down at Morris Motors, the crisis in plant industrial relations saw a sharp increase in contact between senior management and the senior stewards. In 1964, there had been on average of three meetings a fortnight. The following year it was averaging just under four meetings a week.³⁰⁶ At works supervision level, meetings with the workplace leadership reach 240 for 1965, a twenty five per cent increase upon the previous year.³⁰⁷ In the two years to 1966, the time being spent on industrial relations matters by the senior stewards had increased four-fold as they struggled to resolve mass discontent in the workplace.³⁰⁸ It was estimated that the Morris Motors stewards spent 1,827 hours in works time on industrial relations questions during 1965.³⁰⁹ Provision was made in the plant for a senior steward to be brought into an urgent issue within thirty minutes of it arising. The senior stewards, having been given an increased status in the decision-making process within the overall operation of the procedure agreements, found themselves in an invidious position. Possessing increased influence and acceptance by management, they were being drawn into the role of resolving sectional conflicts. In 1965, ninety per cent of the stoppages at Morris Motors arose before the extended procedural machinery could be put into operation.³¹⁰ Of the 297 strikes, 256 broke out before a senior steward had arrived in the shop.³¹¹ By 1967, one in five disputes never entered into procedure at all, 92 per cent of strikes arose before an issue went above the first stage in procedure while in a number of instances the basis of settlements negotiated by full-time officials, resulted in workplace rejection and strike action.³¹²

The crisis in labour relations in the motor industry and the increasing militancy among shop floor workers which arose, in the main, during, but continued after, the 1960 recession, did not so much follow the increased position of authority which was beginning to be bestowed upon the workplace leadership, rather it was already developing in a period when union officialdom itself, exemplified by the AEU EC, and media opinion, had begun to attack the very credibility of workplace organisation. It was however, the nature of these revolts, a multiplicity of spontaneous independent actions at the point of production by various groups of workers, which disclosed not just the inability of works managements to exercise control over labour discipline, but also the very inability of union officialdom itself to maintain order without enhancing the authority of senior stewards. The strategic dilemma which began to confront the management of the motor industry, lay in accepting the particular advice coming from bodies like the Motor Industry Joint Labour Council, under the chairmanship of Jack Scamp, which looked to strengthen the position of representative leadership within the workplace, while advocating a series of reforms which would effectively remove power, but not necessarily representation, from shop stewards on individual sections on the shop floor. This approach was beginning to develop a currency in academic quarters and was to become elaborated more fully as a general solution to the whole of the malaise considered to be afflicting British industrial relations, as later diagnosed by the Donovan Commission. This approach contrasted with the responses of senior managements in the motor industry, who began to look for more immediate solutions to the question of worker indiscipline.

The elevation of workplace leadership on the part of works

management, however, was already underway and can generally be traced back to the events of 1956, if not before. So while attention of considered observers was being directed at emphasising change in the sources upon which discontent appeared to be expressed mainly the operation of pieceworking, the procedures established for the handling of redundancy, shop steward 'protection' and the recognition of works committees and senior stewards, was already not without consequence for both the role of workplace leadership and the attitudes being generated in the workplace.

From the 26 August 1956, onwards, for example, the minutes of the Works Committee and the JSSC began to be typed into a pre-planned format. After 1960, such a traditional institution as the NUVB Cov BC began to adopt a similar streamlining and standardisation in its approach to union business. This should not merely to be accounted for by the inevitable outcome of progress overtaking a customary idiosyncrasy in branch and workplace life, it was more to do with a rationalisation which grew from the general increasing burdens and responsibilities for workplace leadership. Before 1956, for example, the notes of the Longbridge convenor were invariably to be found on near to hand scraps of paper, or on the backs of discarded cigarette packets. By 1962, this basis of the oral presentation of the convenor's report to the JSSC had a pre-typed list of no less than 43 different items.³¹³ Of equal significance in the transformation of workplace leadership in the rise of discontent, was that while the workplace leaderships remained remarkably stable with a high level of continuity in personnel, this contrasted to the position of the sectional stewards, who still spent the majority of their time at their work benches. At Morris Cowley in 1966, there was a reported annual turnover of some 50 per cent among stewards.³¹⁴ Despite the fact that shop steward numbers were

rapidly increasing in all BMC plants at this time, less than a quarter ever attended a meeting outside of works time.³¹⁵ This cannot be adequately explained, for example by a lull in workplace activity. Quite the contrary. At Cowley at this time, there were some 350 industrial relations issues a month, it was estimated, being raised with foremen.³¹⁶ These changes are perhaps better explained by a greater disenchantment with the external influences of union organisations. On the 2 February 1967, for instance, Lord Rootes in his capacity as chairman and managing director of his motor empire, in a confidential letter to Ray Gunter, the then MOL in the Labour Government, raised the question of the new attitude towards union organisation by the motor industry workforce.

"Much of the criticism appeared by trade union witnesses", he claimed, "in explanation of this unhappy situation did not bear very close examination. In particular suggestions that trouble stems from the men's own lack of confidence in supervision must be set against the evident fact that the men have little regard for their own elected representatives or for advice or instructions issued by them".³¹⁷

It was the concern in senior management that union officialdom had lost control over the membership. Increasingly, the rather fragile link between the local union officials and the shop floor worker was through the senior stewards, in their regular contacts with the union branch, district committees, and works conference attendances, rather than the sectional steward. In a place like Austin, the main link between the membership and the increasingly absorbed workplace leadership depended upon the far from regular appearances of sectional stewards at the monthly JSSC meetings. It was in these conditions that in 1970, following the election of a Conservative Government, a letter appeared in The Times on the 24 September, signed by the chairman and managing directors of Ford, Vauxhall, Rootes and the newly formed British Leyland Corporation which

for
called legal remedies for breach of contracts in labour relations.³¹⁸

The approach of senior management however, did not preclude other changes which would have more long term consequences than what could be achieved by labour legislation. This was particularly so over the question of job security. Between 1968 and 1972, throughout the Rootes and BL plants, comprehensive procedure agreements had been introduced which changed the basis for wage determination. Within four years of the merging of BMC with Leyland, at the 77 UK factories which employed a total of 167,670 workers, a restructuring of managerial control with the progressive rationalisation of workplace industrial relations supported by large inputs of public finance, saw the role of the senior stewards and factories convenors increasingly emerging as a lay workplace elite whose activities had become central to both change and the preservation of order in the workplace. It was upon the activities of the workplace leadership that the elaborate procedures for handling the introduction of 'productivity', 'job evaluation', 'job amalgamation', 'job redeployment', 'mobility of labour', 'job mobility', 'grade mobility', 'job transfer', 'disputed manning schedules' and redundancy, now called 'security of employment', were based.³¹⁹

The most obvious change to result from this programme of rationalisation has been job loss and the workplace response to redundancy. In 1965, the newly elected Labour Government introduced as one of its first pieces of labour legislation, the Redundancy Payments Act providing for a statutory payment of compensation of individual workers who lost their jobs through redundancy. In 1966, 10,000 redundancies were declared across BMC, and 30,000 of the Corporations workforce were put on a 4 day week, but only two stoppages took

place. Both were sectional protests. At the Tractor and Transmissions plant, 500 workers struck for three days, while down in Oxford, 222 workers at the Morris Radiator plant endured a 17 day strike to retain their jobs, but without wider support. In the first year of trading, the newly formed BL spent £3.3 million in extra-gratia payments to encourage voluntary redundancy. By 1975, following the publication of the Ryder Report, BL adopted the recommendations to establish a framework for 'Employee Participation' based upon the shop steward organisation, through which the leadership of the workplace, who were also the membership of the BL combine committee, became involved and were expected to share corporate responsibility for widespread change. As recession and crisis hit the motor industry and following the appointment of Michael Edwards as chairman of BL in 1978, a more rapid programme of rationalisation and plant closure was undertaken. Between 1978 and 1981, 68,000 BL workers were made redundant and £200 million of public money was spent on factory closures and extra-gratia redundancy payments. Following the publication of opposition to the unpublished 1980 Corporate Plan, which involved the total or partial closure of 13 factories and a further 25,000 redundancies, the leading workplace representative, Derek Robinson, chairman of the BL combine committee, and a leading advocate of the Employee Participation scheme, who had replaced the most important post war convenor in the British Motor industry, Dick Etheridge, and like Etheridge had spent the whole of his working life at the Austin plant in Longbridge was sacked, following 30 years service, for his alleged role in the combine committee, but not for his activity as works convenor. The sacking was to be a prelude to a management offensive against shop steward activity working conditions and wage rates, prior to the opening of a £275 million investment in robotic engineering. This sharply reduced the number of production workers

and paved the way for a series of declining wage awards to help finance expenditure on labour saving devices. With the installation of a more abrasive kind of management, the increasing association of the workplace leadership with the problem of management efficiency and rationalisation had, in a more centrally controlled organisation, increased the distance of the senior shop steward leadership from a traditional identification with the expectations of shop floor workers. In the growing antipathy and increased credibility gap between workplace workers and workplace leadership, demoralisation and vulnerability, in the face of economic recession, have become once again a major feature in the crisis of workplace power. The 1980's have become the decade for urgent rethinking of the question of workplace power.

CONCLUSIONS

In recent years, what may be generally described as the problematic of workplace power has, at a number of levels, become the subject for much debate, discussion and scrutiny in British industrial relations. If anything, the impact of the current recession upon the responses of the labour movement, both at an institutional and workplace level, has tended to fuel not just debate, but also division, confusion, and uncertainty. What may be perhaps properly described as a major strategic crisis within organised wage labour in Britain, has not only generated both arguments between and within trade union leaderships, as well as activists and representatives in the workplace, and not least actual membership, but it has encouraged disarray concerning future action and increasingly lead to a reappraisal of the past. For the moment at least, economic crisis has, with only a few minor exceptions, not really opened up a vision of an alternative future within which democratic power exercised in industry will be radically transformed. On the contrary, crisis itself has induced an internal crisis of confidence in both workplace and union leadership, which, with the rising levels of unemployment and job insecurity, is in danger of diminishing aspiration, engendering demoralisation and incurring fatalism and despair. Hence the focus upon power.

There is some evidence that organised labour now perceives the transformation which, it has been suggested, has taken place, in the balance of power between organised wage labour and the power and control of management. Though not an absolute guide to actual events, in August 1977, a poll carried out by Market Opinion and Research International found that the number of trade unionists who thought that their own union organisation had 'too much power', declined from a figure of 68 per cent to 58 per cent in less than three years, while those who 'strongly agreed' that their unions had too

much power revealed a more significant fall from 41 to 28 per cent ² in the same period. But beyond evidence of this kind, there has also been a more considered appraisal about why change, if any, has actually taken place. In what is now a widely quoted starting point, Eric Hobsbawm argues that the real advances for the British labour movement ceased at the beginning of the 1950's. In the period since, the activity of the labour movement has been essentially quantitative rather than qualitative, being based upon sectional and economic demands, rather than political change.³ Others point to the view that the demands for qualitative change grew outside the organised labour movement, but some maintain that struggles against coercive labour laws or the expansion of the social wage were themselves indicators of the increasing influence of organised labour during the late 1960's and early 1970's.⁴ But an important question throughout such considerations, raised in recent times, has been the role of workplace organisation and the character of industrial militancy. While it has been widely accepted that in the course of the past thirty years, power has shifted to the workplace, it is now being repeatedly asked 'upon what basis did this shift in power actually rest?'. In other words, what kind of power was it and in whose hands was it being exercised and for what purposes?

A variety of explanations have been put forward for what might be regarded in a number of circles as a regressive movement of power away from an indigenous repository of rank and file control. This has been generally associated with the role of shop stewards. In 1970, for example, Cliff, in what otherwise was not an entirely uncritical view of workplace organisation could argue,

"And who leads the struggle at plant level for improved pay and conditions? Who spearheads wage drift (or wage

drive) movement? Who acts as the main organiser of the unofficial strike? Who really worries the management? Above all, the shop stewards committees and similar rank and file committees". 5

Much of the evidence for this interpretation remained statistical.

And again, in 1975, in a period of increasing crisis the same author could maintain,

"Inflation plus employment bring the class struggle to the centre of political life, at a time when workers are better organised and more self-confident than ever before. Inflation, unemployment to the accompaniment of the 'social contract', will raise for millions of workers the question of who gets what and why. But of the coming struggles a new leadership will emerge from below. Socialism will come in from the cold". 6

In the forward to a recent pamphlet discussing trade union strategy, in the face of developing corporate power, the authors state,

"With a deepening recession, with the more insidious means of control available to management through new technologies, and with the viciously anti-trade union government, things can only get worse, with our plant organisations becoming more and more vulnerable. Unless, that is, we strengthen the shop stewards movement at a company and industry level : and develop alternative policies with which to win the argument against management with the trade union membership". 7

Other authors on the left, however, have displayed a far greater degree of scepticism about uncritical assertions surrounding either the base of workplace power or its future role. Hyman, for example, has, far from viewing workplace organisation as an unambiguous centre of opposition to management control, suggested that the role of workplace leadership is not necessarily immune from what might be seen as a structural incorporation with the interests of management and union officialdom.⁸ More latterly, Lane has ventured the point that the workplace leadership, by its increasing accumulation of the comforts associated with power compromise, appears to be

coming subject to a moral critique on the part of workforces.

Furthermore, structural changes in both the composition and dispersal of industry may be breaking up the traditional order upon which workplace militancy and opposition have become based.⁹ But while this debate has developed concerning the shift in credibility of workplace representatives on the management side of the fence, a report from the CBI presents the decline in the authority of union officialdom over the membership as the central weakness which confronts management in their workplace relations.¹⁰

In general, this more rigorous critique of workplace organisation is clearly a healthy development, for it is surely inadequate to merely cite what might be regarded as objective indices by which to measure or assert changes in power or power relations in regard to wage labour, and its organisations. Use of statistical trends, in union membership, union density, changes in the number of shop stewards or alterations in the ratio of workplace representation to total membership, or data on the willingness of employers to extend collective bargaining rights, union recognition, or shop stewards facilities, or descriptions of workplace procedures, are of limited value in deducing or attempting to assess power in the workplace. Furthermore, a quantitative analysis of strike behaviour is no comprehensive guide to the power of collective unity, or power in workplace organisation. The approach of this study has been to maintain that while power remains a central concept in workplace relations, an approach which is of value in seeking to analyse the concept of power has been to explore the interactions of the principal parties engaged in power struggles, through the study of issues upon which there exists a clear division of interest. The selection of redundancy as an issue of power conflict, has enabled

an account of the question of power to be examined in conditions which are likely, not only to reveal the reasons for the strengths of workplace organisation, but just as importantly the basis of its weaknesses.

In order to draw together the threads of the findings which appear to emerge from this study of redundancy and workplace relations as a key issue of power conflict in the British motor industry, in the context of the current debate over the character of workplace power, it might serve a useful purpose if the three original questions with which the study set out to consider are viewed in the light of a common assertion regarding consciousness and action in a market economy. This is the line that crisis and recession in the workings of market economies not only crystalise a dichotomy of interest between wage labour and capital, but provide conditions for a radicalisation in the consciousness of sellers of wage labour which develops from the experiences of bearing the burden of a crisis over which it has little control. In order to discuss this in the light of the motor industry, it is perhaps important to give some consideration to the structure of decision making, the extent to which workplace organisation appears to act autonomously, in addition to the influence the politics of a left wing workplace leadership has had upon shaping the direction of workplace power.

The extent to which a workplace independence and autonomy can be considered to have existed independently of institutional forces, was largely a phenomenon of the inter war period. From the late 1920's, through the 1930's, workplace action was largely spontaneous and independent of union officialdom, and often given an organisational discipline by activists in the Communist Party. Before the 1934

Pressed Steel strike, . . . there were no local union officials to build an organisation among the semi skilled in areas like Coventry and Oxford. These disputes arose out of a increasingly contradictory labour relations policies. This combined a regionally based employer paternalism common among the small scale Midland manufacturers, which stressed employer co-operation, with a growing reliance upon cash nexus relationships, as a means for intensifying work on assembly lines. It was not until the 1960's, that this type of spontaneous workplace protest re-appeared in the motor industry, and like the 1930's it was closely associated with a condition of fluctuating earnings and high levels of job insecurity. But while the inter war conflicts were independent of union officialdom and rarely produced a permanent organisation, the conflicts in the 1960's were largely beyond the authority of a generally left wing workplace leadership. Why was this so?

It is unquestionably true that the political orientation of the post war shop stewards movement in the motor industry has been closely associated with the left and that members of the Communist Party have been well represented on both workplace organisations and more especially in the leadership of combine committees. What also is of some significance, has been the quite remarkable stability and political continuity of the workplace leadership in the motor industry. At the country's largest plant, Longbridge, over a 37 year period, there has been only three convenors, all of whom were members of the Party. Turnover among factory convenors, even though they are subject to annual election, has, in the motor industry, been considerably lower than that for national trade union officials who are normally elected to office for a longer duration, while it is considerably lower than the very high turnover found among

sectional or departmental stewards. It is not just that CP leadership has stood the test of time, but that it has held office and been returned to office repeatedly through some pretty unpopular periods of communism. For example, the cold war in 1951, Hungary 1956, Czechoslovakia 1968, and Poland in 1972 and 1982. In 1958, for instance, the Longbridge workplace organisation received a Soviet delegation at one of their meetings, though management refused to allow them to tour the works. Many individual members of the BMC combine committee undertook invited visits to East European Countries. Many motor industry workplace organisations with CP members among their leadership sent delegations to the Communist backed World Federation of Trade unions. While it is usually considered that the second world war marked the high point of CP membership in Britain, it was also the period which provided party members, who invariably had some previous organisational experience, to offer themselves as stewards to the influx of new workers in the munitions factories. This period also marks the point of collaboration in workplace relations. It was the CP which was at the forefront of the campaign for JPC's, as it was the CP convenors who were among those signing the redundancy lists in 1945.

While 1939 to 1945 saw such a rapid growth in trade union membership, the re-establishment of workplace organisation took place in conditions of national unity between the interests of capital and labour, for the national emergency. It was also the case that this period saw what emerged as the ideal war time model for workplace organisation. This was basically a version of what had already been in existence at AWA just before the war, but had been extended to the Coventry Shadow factories and became the basis upon which organisation at Standard Motors developed after 1945, under a CP

workplace leadership. What was novel about Standard, was the ingenious adoption of a large gang system operating in the aircraft industry, to the assembly of cars and tractors. By 1956, before the big strike, approximately one worker in every thirty among the works 11,000 labour force read the Daily Worker. The power base of what was the highest paid car factory in the UK, and possibly also in engineering, however, arose not just from the autonomy of workplace organisation, it was also dependent upon agreements which had been signed by the local CSEU officials after the firm went outside the Federation. It was an arrangement with Jack Jones, the DS to the CSEU to supply labour to the firm by the unions which protected the CP base and which was unlikely to arise in other workplaces where a more prudent selection of workforces by management, like, for example, at Austin, was likely to take place.

But while the standard model for workplace organisation was clearly an 'organisational' success, in its approach to establish a 100 per cent organisation and in overcoming the inter union strife and sectional divisions so common to the industry, it also involved the centralisation of the workplace leadership around senior stewards who undertook a level of responsibility for seeing that production targets they had agreed with production management, were being met by the workforce. Therefore, before 1956, the particular form of workplace organisation that existed was still to some extent dependent upon both local officials and the general attitudes of the works management. It was, however, following a change in management personnel, and a consequent change in managerial strategy, that the adoption of a combine 'no redundancy' policy met with a head-on conflict with the Standard management. The two week unofficial strike was perhaps the most important job security strike in the

whole post war motor industry. The Standard had become the vanguard not just for the combine policies of 'no redundancy', but also for the wider demand for the 'right to work', which went far beyond, in its implications, than merely the motor industry. It was a political struggle in the sense that it was, in the face of a Conservative Government, defending the 1944 political commitment to full employment. Consequently, the unofficial workplace action not only caused such a flurry in political circles, being discussed in cabinet the Prime Minister, commissioning research into the social effects of automation. but it saw massive widespread support from workforces outside the motor industry. That such support coming in the main from what were lower paid workers, contributing to some of the highest paid workers in British industry of that period, and car workers at that, is perhaps inconceivable in the current period. But as the workplace leadership openly discouraged sympathy action and relinquished control over the dispute to a divided national leadership, the works management took a defiant stand against the principle of 'no redundancy'. It not only issued redundancy notices in order to divide the workforce, who were becoming less sure of their position, following the evident confusion among the NC's, but in the process it had dismissed half the shop stewards, through redundancy. This was a severe defeat for the only 100 per cent organised factory in the motor industry, with perhaps the strongest left wing workplace leadership anywhere in the country. The dispute was a vivid illustration that the independent self activity of workplace organisation was also contingent upon the complicity of a particular managerial strategy. When this changed, a cohesive left wing workplace organisation became vulnerable, half of its stewards being wiped out. It was in exchange for a commitment towards higher productivity and flexible working

practices upon the preservation of labour discipline by a workplace leadership, that a works management outside the Federation gave tacit support for a left wing stewards organisation.

At Austin, on the other hand, the dependence of the workplace organisation on officialdom was far greater. It was not merely the question of the size of the Longbridge plant, but, as the works was not just an assembler of cars, also manufacturing some components its own, it contained a diverse body of trades and unions. With much higher levels of non-unionism than at Standard, the two primary problems faced by its left wing workplace leadership was the basic question of union recruitment and the equally important unity between the workplace unions. The most important affect of the CP influence within the trade union leaderships was that it provided a common ground for establishing an organised unity among the senior stewards. The broadness of union representation on the works committee was more representative of the number of plant unions, but it was less representative of the distribution of union membership. Given the disquiet in the AEU, and given the traditional attitudes held by a union like the NUVB, it is difficult to conceive any individual union foregoing part of its influence in the works. It was the common political affiliations among the senior stewards that provided for an administrative workplace unity. This was a crucial development, because it was only from within a unified workplace leadership that many of the inter union, inter work group squabbles which beset Longbridge, could be settled amicably, particularly in periods of union growth or the effect of changing technology upon skills, materials used and the workers who claimed jurisdiction over them.

It is, however, not entirely possible to say that the influence of the CP leadership was primarily responsible for the organisational dependence upon local officialdom. On the contrary, it was more the evident weakness of organisations in general and the distance of the works committee from the workforce, which contributed to the increased dependence of such a large and diversified workplace organisation upon local officialdom. This dependence was further reinforced by the strategy adopted by the works management to refuse to recognise the works committee and senior stewards in the period before 1956. Not only were the workplace leadership solely dependent upon local officials for access to management on important decisions, but management's policy of only recognising Dick Etheridge, restricted the independence of the workplace organisation and perhaps ironically from the management's point of view, reinforced the influence of centralism and the position of the CP. This process of dependence upon officialdom, in the context of a general hostility on the part of management towards workplace influence, not only discouraged independent action, but also made the workplace organisation particularly exposed to the actions of both management and officials when it did act independently over the defence of workplace organisation.

Dependence upon officialdom meant dependence upon inter union division among officials. This was most evident in the Pegg and Bills dispute, where the TGWU called a separate meeting of their membership to oppose the JSSC decision to defend workplace organisation. The consequences of divisions among officialdom not only locally, but nationally, over the question of redundancy and the defence of workplace organisation, was most clearly seen in the McHugh dispute which must rank along with the sacking of Derek Robinson of how important are

limits to official support for workplace organisation. Though the strike was recognised by the NUVB, it nearly financially broke the union. The outcome was not just the removal of a chief steward, but the extinction of the vehicle builders' workplace organisation. The weaknesses in the Longbridge workplace organisation in the early 1950's, arising from the existence of non union members and the actions of management, served to increase the dependence of the workplace upon the CSEU officials, but it was the vulnerability to union divisions that not only weakened the independence of workplace organisation, but enabled the works management to remove elected left wing representatives and engage in a policy of restriction and obstruction towards the workings of workplace representation. Oddly enough, these measures only reinforced the dependence of workplace organisation on officials. After both the Pegg and Bills and the McHugh dispute, it was the CSEU officials who stepped in to revive workplace organisation and leadership. The officials not only witnessed the annual elections, but drew up the workplace constitution. It was, however, the increasing involvement of the workplace leadership in the practical arrangements for recognition, transfer, mobility and the operation of the redundancy procedure agreements, after 1956, which led to a growing acceptance of their presence on behalf of management at Longbridge, though it was some time before they were prepared to formally acknowledge this in recognition agreements, and procedures 'protecting' the position of shop stewards.

On the role of combine committees, where CP influence was strongly represented, particularly on the important main committee and steering committees for both the MSSC and the BMC combine committee, they had a clear opportunity to influence policy and action.

Although the position of Bill Warman appeared to be more ambivalent in his attitude towards union officials, it was certainly not the intention of the BMC combine to challenge either the position of the union leaderships or to generally contemplate action, independent of union authority. This distinction between the Standard leadership and that of the Austin and Nuffield organisations, could of course be explained again by the unusual conditions which framed the particular type of dependent relations upon both management and union officialdom, compared to the experiences of low unionisation and hostile management in the BMC plants which increased a more obvious dependence on the official organisations. From the constitution of the BMC and its actions, it is evident that they saw the building of union memberships, rather than the reform or displacement of union organisation, as being central to their realisation of policy. Hence much of their actions were undertaken through policy resolution through the local branches. Again, given the weaknesses of workplace organisation in BMC, and the dependence upon officials in their domestic organisation, this may not have been an unrealistic strategy. After all, it was after combine support for unofficial action over the sacking of Frank Horsman, which saw the AEU EC issue suspensions and prescriptions against leading stewards. Weak organisations may not be the best grounds from which to fight an internal battle with union officials, particularly with a hostile management in the wings.

While strategically, in the given circumstances of the distribution of power in the motor industry, the positions adopted by the workplace leadership could be justified on pragmatic grounds. But where criticism is probably more justified is in the area of policy, and more importantly, the consequences of allowing

officialdom the initiative to settle conflicts. This was especially so on the issue of redundancy.

It could be maintained that the 'no redundancy' policies adopted by the 'Big Five' conferences saw the spectre of workplace combine committees at their height. It appeared no longer merely as an administrative organisation of a select workplace leadership, but attracted wide involvement of rank and file stewards across the whole of the industry, covering a wide range of unions. But there were some basic limitations in their policy. Firstly, the 'Big Five' meetings fully accepted the introduction of automation and technical change as being a progressive force, provided the surplus created was shared with the workforce, in terms of wages rather than ^{only} distributed in profits. Secondly, the combine committees saw opposition to redundancy largely in terms of work sharing. ie. more flexible working arrangements, transferring of workers within plants, but largely short time working. In other words, it was based upon 'sharing the misery' rather than posing an alternative basis of control over the defence of jobs, or the opposition to de-skilling techniques. There was no radical proposals for a qualitative change in control over the conditions under which labour power was to be exchanged. The most important outcome of this was that the combine committees were actually accepting a policy towards redundancy and the 'right of work', in a framework which could be relatively easily undermined by redundancy agreements offering compensation, and dividing worker rights to employment in terms of security, trade, skill and section, was not just 'sharing the misery' but ^{failing to provide} an alternative critique in which job control would form a basis for existing and future employment. 'Sharing the misery' created the prospect of relieving the poverty of short time, through

the payment of financial inducements to leave.

Such an alternative critique would have had to be fought for, not just against employer prerogative, but also against union officialdom and ultimately the State. There was perhaps just the semblance that such a basis could have developed in the values, attitudes and 'job culture' of the NUVB, whose historic origins predated the motor industry and generally lay in a craft tradition which had existed outside the engineering industry. But its strong workplace allegiances merely served to provide a somewhat insular collective independence which was confined to the body shops and trim sections of certain Coventry and Birmingham plants. While it jealously guarded the independence of the society, and the virtues of the skilled men in what had become largely a de-skilled workplace, despite the desire of its left wing NE to extend its influence in the motor industry in a period of union growth, it was largely local influences of members which prevented this breaking out beyond its traditional spheres of organisation. The longstanding employer offensive against the vehicle builders eventually came to an end in 1970, when they were taken over by the TGWU, giving this union some 80 per. cent of total union membership in the motor industry.

The claim that crisis and recession provide workers with a fundamental lesson in the workings of political economy of market societies, has in the experience of the motor industry generally produced defensive confrontations, rather than provide a school for alternatives to the terms under which wage labour is exchanged. Not only did redundancy at Crossley Motors, Standard, Carbodies, Daimler, Rover, Armstrong-Siddeley and Austin all result in the removal of important members of the workplace leadership, but works management invariably acted

in this way prior to the introduction of new car models, which would otherwise have increased the prospects for wage bargaining. Furthermore, the virtual elimination of the NUVB, one of the strongest organised sections of the Austin labourforce, after the McHugh strike, the removal of half the Standard shop stewards and even the dismissal of Frank Horsman, and later Derek Robinson, all paved the way for an attack upon rates and conditions. Important though the lessons in power conflict may have been, where victimisation through redundancy was actually resisted, notably at Duples, Carbodies, and Jaguar, at the beginning of the 1950's, it was the union local officials who signed redundancy procedure agreements. While these were intended to reduce the more blatant forms of victimisation, they actually elevated the position of senior stewards in the actual operation of these procedures.

Redundancy procedures, however, while they brought about an increased acceptance on the part of managements of the senior positions in the workplace leaderships, they also contained an important, but subtle change. They did not forego the right of managerial prerogative, but under the growing influence of the left in the national leadership of the TGWU, not only was there a strengthening of the positions of senior stewards in procedures for the workplace, but there was a simultaneous acceptance upon the part of union officialdom in the merits of JSSC's. This is perhaps most clearly shown by the effect of the appointment of Jack Jones and Les Kealey in the No 5 Region on the Austin Works Committee. The price of acceptance was increased pressure to act constitutionally, though adherence to procedures, the operation of which, however, over redundancy, would transform the collective concept of 'the right to work' and 'no redundancy'. Importantly, it was acceptance of senior stewards in their domestic workplace role.

There was to be no acceptance of such stewards in the positions on Combine Committees. The ploy of union officialdom was therefore based upon retaining their control and dependence over workplace organisation.

It is possible to see that the origin of redundancy procedures, which under the EWO's were attempts to stratify the workforce by skills and experience for directing essential labour for the war effort, had gained considerable acceptance through the involvement of workplace representatives. It had been these principles, which were endorsed in the Special Redundancy Procedure for the rundown of the munitions industries, which were being applied in Coventry following the 1951 redundancy strike at Jaguar. But whereas the wartime measures gave stewards a right of veto and were basically concerned for a more efficient distribution of labour to important war work, at Jaguar procedures were established to give individual entitlements to a job. This divisive effect was extended following the Standard and BMC redundancy agreements in 1956, to include a differential right to compensation for the loss of a job. It was among the NUVB members at Jaguar and Morris Bodies in Coventry, that this criteria was resisted before 1956, while the creation of the type of private employer compensation did not appear to have much affect at removing resistance to redundancy in the 1960-61 recession. It was therefore as a result of collective opposition where management had to face retaining labour on short time, or for example, at Rootes, where it had to confront a company-wide revolt organised through an unofficial combine committee, that one of the first pieces of industrial relations legislation introduced by a newly elected Labour Government in 1964, was the creation of the right to universal compensation for workers made redundant. Compensation, in terms of the act, were to be calculated upon the accumulating monetary assessment of individual

seniority. The private arrangements before this point by individual companies, were largely based upon the seniority of broad groups of workers, rather than the position of isolated individuals. The scale of compensation, for example, which was agreed following the 1956 BMC strike, and which became the model for such private arrangements among federated employers, was based upon only one week's extra pay for all those redundant with between 3-10 years service, and only two weeks extra pay for all those with 10 or more years service. While this clearly was a divisive move, it did retain common grounds of interest among those broad categories of workers. It was statutory entitlements which in an attempt to break grounds for collective opposition, introduced the notion of individually differentiated rights to redundancy compensation.

This investigation of redundancy as a key issue in power conflict in workplace relations, has reinforced the view that procedures and institutional arrangements through which decisions are taken by those engaged in an interactive relationship, cannot be viewed as being inconsequential to the exercise of power, and to the outcomes of power conflict in workplace industrial relations. The exercise of power and authority in organised production relationships, are structured by irreversible roles, in which workplace organisations occupy a subordinate position in relation to the authority of management. The power of workplace organisation however, or changes in the balance of that power in relation to management authority, should not under-estimate the continuing influence of management or trade union officialdom. An analysis of workplace power cannot be satisfactorily understood, merely by accounts which seek to only stress the importance of worker self activity. Rather, workplace organisation must be considered from within the complexities of a continuous dynamic interactive relationship,

which involves the interests and actions, not just of organised wage labour, but also that of management and their organisations, the State, as well as both the structure and actions of various unions and union officialdom. In this process, set within a wider framework of prevailing economic and political circumstances, the effect of the realisation of interests through strategy and policy, became critical points for evaluation of the outcomes of power relationships in which workplace power is situated. Here, it has been disclosed how workplace organisation, occupying a subordinate position in terms of managerial organisation and union officialdom, that even the most effectively organised workplace leaderships, are constantly vulnerable in times of recession, to the challenge of management. The limits of workplace organisation are both determined by its inability to transcend the workings of a market economy, while its representation of workplace interest cannot be expressed entirely independently of the interests of management or union officialdom.

Both a failure to support the actions of workplace organisation by individual unions or their local officials, can not only weaken the ability of workplace organisation to command the support of the rank and file, but such actions can provide opportunities for management to curtail the activities of workplace organisation, and even lead to attacks upon rates and conditions. But even among strongly organised workplaces, the workplace leadership is never entirely free to act independently of management. The greater acceptance of workplace leadership, on the part of management, has invariably been contingent upon some other requirement, like production responsibilities, co-operation over working arrangements, mobility of labour, the operation of procedures, or the restraining of rank and file revolts. Such managerial support, however, has itself usually been conditional

upon a rigorous acceptance of the workings of procedure, and the constitutional settlement of grievances. Workplace leaderships have inevitably been faced with choices which emphasise accommodations with managements, or pursue a course of conflict in which either a failure to receive official support from officialdom or a reaction for management may, particularly in a period of recession, make representative leaderships vulnerable. Where however, workplace leaderships are drawn into adopting accommodatory positions, they may find themselves confronting spontaneous outbreaks of workgroup or sectional dissent.

The strategies and actions of workplace organisation are, therefore, inevitably actions which involve a considerable level of political discretion. In the motor industry, workplace leaderships have sought to establish a unity within the workplace by forming joint committees to overcome sectional divisions, which arise out of the division of labour and from the independent character of different workplace unions, but on the other hand, cannot be indifferent to the influence of union officials or inter union conflict on the behaviour of workplace membership. We have seen also, that within the realm of having to act 'politically', in terms of judgements surrounding power conflicts, the politics of action in terms of the ideologies and values of workplace leaderships have not been without affect in decision on whether to lead policies independently of union officials, or pursue them through the course of union channels. Despite the influence of the CP, it has been seen that the maintenance of unity in the workplace, and the continued dependence of workplace organisation upon local officials, has resulted in a generally strong commitment to constitutional action on the part of workplace leaderships, even through their own combine organisations. The central problematic of workplace power has been that in the daily enstrangements with managements and

union officialdom, workplace organisation continues to be tied to relationships of subordination and dependence. In a market economy, it therefore remains constantly vulnerable to conditions of uncertainty and the ultimate exercise of managerial power.

FOOTNOTES

THE INTRODUCTION : JOB SECURITY AND WAGE LABOUR

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PART I : THE QUESTION OF POWER

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- 14 Op cit
- 15 J Greenwood and R Pearson, 'Redundancies and Labour Displacement : Effects within a local labour market', Industrial Relations Journal, Vol.10, No.1, 197
- 16 See for example, Wedderburn, 1965, op cit, pp 186-188;
For an earlier example, see : Acton Society Trust, A Survey of Problems and Practices, Acton Society Trust, 1958. And more recently, P Warr and J Lovatt, 'Retraining and other factors associated with job finding after redundancy', Journal of Occupational Psychology, No.50, 1977, pp 67-84.
- 17 C Tausky and E B Piedmont, 'The meaning of work and unemployment', International Journal of Social Psychiatry, Vol.14, 1967, pp 44-49.
- 18 R L Kahn and J R P French, ' Status Conflict : Two themes in the study of stress', in J E McGrath (ed), Social and Psychological Factors in Stress, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York, 1970.
- 19 W G Strange, 'Job loss' : A Psycho-social study of worker reactions to a plant closing in a company town in South Appalachia', Dissertation Abstracts International, Vol.38, 1978.
- 20 B Hopson and J Adams, 'Towards an understanding of Transition: Defining some boundaries of transition dynamics', in J Adams, J Hayes and B Hopson, Transition, Martin Robertson, London, 1976, postulate a seven stage series during a psycho-social transition. Though

the individuals experience is Presented within a framework of staged change it remains a process containing conflicting and even opposing emotive content at the different levels, for self-esteem.

- 21 R Harrison, 'The Demoralising experiences of prolonged unemployment', Employment Gazette, Vol. 84, No.4, 1976. pp 339-348.
- 22 J Hill, The Social and Psychological Impact of Unemployment: A Pilot Study, Tavistock Institute of Human Relations, London 1977, No.2, 74, also J Hill, "The Psychological Impact of Unemployment", New Society, Vol. January 1978, pp 118-120.
- 23 K H Briar, 'The Effect of long term unemployment on workers and their families', Dissertation Abstracts International, Vol.37, 1977. Presents a three staged process of adjustment in self esteem following job-loss. The initial shock is followed by optimism in which high expectations of prospects in the labour market, are often associated with a belief in acquiring a better job than the one lost. The continued state of job-lessness, however, eventually induces self-blame, and depression, as unemployment becomes a way of life. Individual job search activity declines into a state of inertia.
- 24 P Eisenberg and P F Lazarsfeld, 'The Psychological Effects of Unemployment', Psychological Bulletin, Vol.35, 1938, pp 358-90 : See also E W Bakke, The Unemployed Man, Nisbett, New York, 1933; and, E W Bakke, Citizens Without Work, Yale U P, New Haven, Conn.,

1940; for in depth accounts of inter-war unemployment.

25 Op cit, p340.

26 E Durkheim, Suicide : A case study in Sociology, Routledge
& Kegan Paul, London, 1952.

27 P Sainsbury, Suicide in London : an Ecological Study,
Maudsley Monograph No.1, Chapman & Hall, London, 1955
found that suicides were three times higher among
the unemployed than among the rest of the population.
It is among these groups with the poorest prospects
for future employment, who experience social rejection
and alienation that the incidence of suicide is
highest.

28 E Powell, 'Occupation, status and suicide: towards a
redefinition of anomie', American Social Review,
Vol.23, 1958, pp 131-9. Reported a relationship
between occupational role and suicide, but suicide
among males remains greatest among those without an
occupation.

29 J B Morris, M Kovacs, M Beck and A Wolfpe, 'Notes towards
an epideniology of urban suicide', in Comprehensive
Psychiatry, Vol.15, No.6, pp 537-47, found 26 per
cent of white male suicides, and 34 per cent of
black male suicides in the Philadelphia medical
records, were unemployed.

30 W Breed, 'Occupational mobility and suicide among white
males', American Sociological Review, Vol.28,
No.2, pp 179-88 suggests downward mobility resulting
from unemployment, and difficulties at work, may be
a factor increasing the likelihood of suicide in
susceptible individuals.

- 31 D M Sheperd and B M Barraclough, 'Work and Suicide : an empirical investigation', British Journal of Psychiatry, No.136, pp 469-478. Their evidence supports Durkheim's view of the protective value of belonging to a workforce, and job loss weakens social integration through the absence of integrating into the workforce. However, they suggest that the resulting loss of status and social deprivation may also be a result of the individuals "psychiatric morbidity", which may be a cause in their work capacity.
- 32 S J Hepworth, 'Moderating factors of the psychological impact of unemployment', Journal of Occupational Psychology, No.53, 1980. pp 139-145.
- 33 For example, Hill op cit, 1978, stresses, "A major effect of unemployment is that it tends to be socially isolating. At the psychological level there is the shock, shame, loss of confidence and loss of occupational identity..... There is also the direct loss of the workplace as a source of conversation and social contact. However, B Thomas and C Madigan, 'Strategy and job choice after redundancy : a case study in the aircraft industry', Sociological Review, Vol.22, 1974, claims the actual redundancy involved a 'moral' redefinition of their attitudes towards work. "....the redundancy for a majority of these men was not simply an inconvenience anticipated in the course of a normal work life, but was 'moral', in that it entailed a substantial redefinition of their perceptions of work; a

redefinition which was generally in a downwards direction towards less satisfactory work", p100. For a critique of the Labour Economists approach see S J Wood and J Cohen, 'Approaches to the study of Redundancy', Industrial Relations Journal, Vol.8, No.4, 1977, pp 19-23.

J F Hartley, 'The impact of unemployment upon the self-esteem of Managers', Journal of Occupational Psychology, No.53, 1980, pp 147-55, has criticised the over simplified use of 'self-esteem' in a number of studies of redundancy and unemployment.

While she calls for greater differentiation in conceptual constructs of self-esteem, to recognise assumptions and values, towards work and unemployment, she suggests this should be established around individual reactions to job loss.

34

"Particular individuals find themselves on the labour market at a specified time as a result of managerial decisions and their own inability to resist their implementation", R Martin and R H Fryer, 'Management and Redundancy : an analysis of planned organisational change', British Journal of Industrial Relations, Vol.9, 1970, p84 : also; "In a redundancy situation the employees are faced with the decision of the employer to contract or close a particular enterprise, and to dismiss some or all of those employed in that enterprise. Analysis of this situation is concerned with the course of the closure and dismissals....", M I A, Bulmer 'Workings of the redundancy payments in the Durham Coalfield', Industrial Relations Journal,

Vol.2, No.4, 1971. p7.

For an account of the influence of the local labour market upon managerial policy and decision making in recruitment and redundancy see, D M Mackay, D Boddy, J Brack, J A Diak, and N J Jones, Labour Markets under different employment Conditions, Allen and Unwin, London, 1971, pp 32-47, 367-370.

35 Thomas and Madigan op cit, p 92-93.

36 See for example, discussions in Martin and Fryer, 1973, op cit, pp 51-69, Also, G L Palmer, The Reluctant Job Changer, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1962, p78 for an account of worker immobility.

37 See for example, Parker et al, p100, Table 3.38 : also S Parker, 'The effects of redundancy', in G Esland, G Salamon, and M A Speakman, People and Work, O U P, 1975, pp 96-98.

38 J Hartley and C L Cooper, 'Redundancy : a psychological Problem?', Personnel Review, Vol.5, No.3, 1976. p46.

39 Op cit, 1973, p48.

40 S Wood, 'Managerial Reactions to job redundancy through early Retirements', Sociological Review, Vol.28, 1980, p803.

41 J E T Eldridge, Industrial disputes : essays on the Sociology of Industrial Relations, Routledge, Kegan Paul, London, 1968, p225.

42 P Selgow, 'Reactions to redundancy : the influence of the work situation', Industrial Relations Journal, Vol.1, No.2, pp 7-22, He compares the differences of structure, in terms of technology, payment systems,

and informal work relations, between two departments,
with the workforces' attitudes towards redundancy.

43 Ibid, pl2.

44 Ibid, pl2.

45 See for example, R Martin, The Sociology of Power, Routledge
and Kegan Paul, London, 1977 : B Barry (ed),
Power and Political Theory : some European Perspectives,
J Wiley, London, 1976.

46 Martin Ibid, p38, 48; R E Dause and J A Hughes, Political
Sociology, J Wiley, London, 1972, p7 : and for a
fuller discussion, see D M White, 'The problem of
power', British Journal of Political Science, Vol.2,
1972, pp 479-90.

47 B Russell, Power : a new social analysis, Allen and Unwin,
London, 1938, p35.

48 T Parsons, Sociological Theory and Modern Society, Collier-
Macmillan, London, 1967, p318.

49 ".....power becomes the facility for the achievement of
collective goals through the 'agreement' of the
members of society to legitimise leadership positions
- and to give those in such positions a mandate to
develop policies and implement decisions in the
furtherance of the goals of the system", A Giddens,
'Power', in the recent writings of Talcott Parsons',
Sociology, Vol.2, 1968, p259.

50 M Weber, The theory of social and economic organisation,
trans. A M Henderson and T Parsons (ed), J Parsons,
Free Press, New York, 1964, pl52.

51 Ibid.

52 R Dahrendorf, Class and class conflict in Industrial Society,

Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1959, p166.

- 53 K Marx, Wage Labour and Capital, Progress Publishers, Moscow
1970, p37.
- 54 K Marx and F Engels, The German Ideology, (ed) C J Arthur,
Laurence and Wishart, London, 1970, p64.
- 55 "The concept of bargaining power is shown to be a blunderbuss
rather than a refined tool of analysis", C E Lindblom,
" 'Bargaining power', in Price and Wage Determination",
Quarterly Journal of Economics, (62), 1948, p417.
Part of the explanation arises from the poor status
of theory in industrial relations, and the
empiricist tradition in the research undertaken.
G S Bain and H A Clegg, 'A strategy for Industrial
Relations research in Great Britain', British Journal
of Industrial Relations, Vol.12, March 1974, p103,
"The.... survey of industrial relations research in
Britian suggests that it is for the most part
characterised by fact-finding and description rather
than by theoretical analysis and generalisation.
This is also true of industrial relations research
in the United States and other countries".
R Hyman, Industrial Relations : a Marxist Introduction,
Macmillan, London, 1975, pp 2-3, "Suspicion of open
theorising is particularly common in industrial
relations..... Even among academic analysts of
industrial relations there is considerable reluctance
to concentrate explicitly on the discussion of
theory. The literature provides a great wealth of
empirical detail on trade unions, employers
organisations, bargaining systems, processes of wage

determination and so on; but so complex is the picture that emerges that any purely empirical or descriptive account of British industrial relations is altogether perplexing to the student".

General theory has largely centred around an 'industrial relations system' in which the establishment of 'rules' has become the main focus of attention. The systems approach has acknowledged difficulties in handling such dynamic concepts like "power", "conflict", and "change", but possesses questionable theoretical validity. "At its core, what emerges is no more than a taxonomic device with little theoretical analysis". R Singh 'Industrial Relations : time for a reappraisal?', Industrial Relations Journal, Vol.7, No.3, 1976, p62 and; leads to "description rather than explanation" of the nature of industrial relations systems. S Hill and K Thurley, 'Sociology and Industrial Relations', British Journal of Industrial Relations, Vol.12, No.2, 1974, p154.

- 56 See for example, D G Harper and E H M Argent, 'An Empirical study of power and bargaining relationships in an industrial organisation', in P Abell (ed), Organisations as Bargaining and Influence Systems, Heinemann, London, 1975, pp 72-103, Also, P Abell, 'Organisations as Bargaining and Influence Systems : Measuring intra-organisational power and influence', in P Abell Ibid, pp 10-41.

S Clegg, has argued for an organisational theory of power to encompass wider social formations rather

than a general theory applicable to all organisations".

"Power, Organisational Theory Marx and Critique"

in S Clegg and D Dunkerley, Critical Issues in Organisations, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1977, pp 21-41.

For a sociological approach to power in organisations see J Pfeffer, Power in Organisations, Pitman, London, 1981. pp 35-67.

57 See for example, V L Allen, Social Analysis : A Marxist Critique and Alternative, Longman, London, 1975, pp 216-222, and, Alan Fox, Beyond Contract : Work, Power and Trust Relations, Faber and Faber, London, 1974 : for general usage of power.

For the use of power as a concept in workplace relations analysis, see M Poole, 'A power analysis of workplace labour relations', Industrial Relations Journal, Vol.7, No.3, 1976, pp 31-43, and S Hill, 'Norms Groups and Power : the Sociology of Workplace Industrial Relations', British Journal of Industrial Relations, Vol.12, No.2, 1974, pp 213-235.

G G Somers, 'Bargaining Power and Industrial Relations Theory', in G G Somers, Essays in Industrial Relations Theory, Iowa State, U P, 1969, has argued for a multidisciplinary approach to theory in which power in bargaining would provide a distinctive feature in industrial relations, p39-54.

58 Flanders, for example maintains that, "A system of industrial relations in system of rules", "Collective Bargaining", he suggests "is a rule-making process and involves a power relationship between organisations".

A Flanders, 'Collective Bargaining : a theoretical analysis', British Journal of Industrial Relations, Vol.6, No.1, 1968. p R Hyman op cit, 1975, however, argues of this approach. "The focus is on how any conflict is contained and controlled, rather than on the processes through which disagreements and disputes are generated. From this perspective the question whether the existing structure of ownership and control in industry is an inevitable source of conflict is dismissed as external to the study of industrial relations - which must be concerned solely with how employers, trade unions and other institutions cope with such conflict". p11, He goes on to maintain that it is the formal power of the employer which are continually being the subject of challenge which provides a central feature in industrial relations. "An increasing power struggle is therefore a central feature of industrial relations". Ibid, p26.

- 59 It is evident that there are a number of differing emphasis within common framework of the main exponents of the 'Oxford School', for an important insight, see, R Hyman 'Pluralism, Procedural consenses and collective bargaining', British Journal of Industrial Relations, Vol. No. 19
- For a critique of the 'Oxford School', and particularly their failure to adequately distinguish 'Power' from 'Authority' see, J H Goldthorpe, 'Industrial Relations in Great Britain, a critique of Reformism', Politics and Society, Vol.1 1974 pp

60

For Aron, Plural Society is the outcome of "the relation between social differentiation and political hierarchy in modern societies". R Aron, 'Social structure and the ruling class', British Journal of Sociology. 1950. p2 : Chapman sees it as a "resilient rationality to the politics of a society, offers its members the satisfaction of both co-operative and competitive achievement, and works to stabilise their common conception of justice. The aim is to divorce moral and economic progress from political instability". J W Chapman, 'Voluntary Associations and the Political Theory of Pluralism', in J Rolands^s and J W Chapman (ed), Voluntary Associations, Atherton Press, New York, 1969, p91.

Clark Kerr et al, however, talks of "Pluralistic Industrialism". "This term is used to refer to an industrial society which is governed neither by one all-powerful elite (the monistic model) nor by the impersonal interaction of innumerable small groups with relatively equal and fractionalised power (the atomised model in Economic theory). The complexity of the fully developed industrial society requires, in the name of efficiency and initiative, a degree of decentralisation of control, particularly in the consumer goods and service trades industries : but it also requires a large measure of central control by the state and conduct of many operations by large and scale organisations", C Kent, J T Dunlop, F Harbison, C A Myers.

Industrialism and Industrial Man, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1973, p270.

61 Quoted in R Miliband, The State in Capitalist Society, Wiedenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1969, p3.

62 Ibid.

63 D Riesman, The Lonely Crowd, Double day Anchor, New York, 1953, p239.

64 Ibid, p257.

65 Ibid, p257.

66 J K Galbraith, American Capitalism, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1963, p125FF, and, J K Galbraith, The Affluent Society, (2nd ed), Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1970, p178.

67 W Kernhauser, The Politics of Mass Society, Free Press, New York, 1959, p101.

68 R A Dahl, Who Governs? Democracy and Power in an American City, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1961, p93.

69 D B Trueman, The Governmental Process, Knapf, New York, 1958, p512-513.

70 Riesman, op cit, pp 244-251.

71 Though pluralism challenges the notion of a single dominant elite, its own conception of democracy and participation falls short of mass participation. "The pluralist model.... is not a model of direct participatory democracy but on the contrary one of mediated indirect participation with the bulk of people complicit and uninterested in direct participation". Dowse and Hughes, op cit, p136. For pluralists fears of mass involvement, see,

S M Lipset (ed) Politics and the Social Sciences,
Oxford U P, New York, Ch.4, Also, R A Dahl op cit,
pp 311-325.

- 72 For an extensive bibliography see, for example, W D Hawley
and F M Wirt (eds), The Search for Community Power
Prentice-Hall, New Jersey, 1968.
- 73 R A Dahl, 'The Concept of Power', in R Bell, D V Edwards
and R Wagner (eds), Political Power : A reader
in Theory and Research, Free Press, New York :
Collier-Macmillan, 1969, p80.
- 74 For a more elaborate account of this point see P Morriss,
'Power in New Haven : A reassessment of 'Who Governs',
British Journal of Political Science, Vol.2, 1972,
pp 457-459.
- 75 Ibid, p459.
- 76 Ibid, p459.
- 77 Ibid, p459-460.
- 78 Dahl, op cit, p37.
- 79 Ibid
- 80 Ibid p38.
- 81 D Easton, The Political System, Knopf, New York, 1953,
p185.
- 82 I D Balbus, 'The Concept of Interest in Pluralist and Marxian
Analysis', in Politics and Society, Vol.1, 1971, "....
when individuals do not participate in political
issues or decisions..., when they do not have any
preferences with respect to them - they do not have
any interest in them", p163-164 : The pluralist
view of subjective interests tied to decision-making
fails to adequately distinguish between "interested

in" and "affected by", decisions. Ibid, p164.

- 83 N W Palsby, Community Power and Political Theory, New Haven, Yale U P, 1963, has suggested that the importance of decisions ought to be determined by the number of people affected by the outcomes; the variety of community resources employed; the extent to which outcomes affect the distribution of resources; and how the existing distribution of resources is affected by these outcomes.
- This quantitative approach has been criticised for being unable to determine exact measures of affectiveness, adapting the prevailing status quo as the criterion for judgement, while becoming concerned with distribution of resources, but ignoring the intensity felt about issues and decisions. F W Frey 'Comment : on issues and non-issues in the study of power', American Political Science Review, Vol.65, 1971, p1084-1085.
- A S McFerland, Power and Leadership in Pluralist Systems, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1969, p82 has criticised Palsby's failure to evaluate issues from the value perspective of the actors involved. p82.
- 84 Morriss op cit, p462-3 : also, R E Wolfinger ' Non-decisions and the study of Local Politics', American Political Science Review, Vol.65, 1971, pp1064-1065.
- 85 Morriss, Ibid.
- 86 M Janowitz, "Community Power and 'policy science' Research", Public Opinion Quarterly, No.26, 1962, p405.
- 87 P M Partridge, 'Some notes on the concept of power',

Political Studies, Vol.11, 1963, p31-32.

88 "Everyday activities, such as certain reactions towards women or thousands of minor policies in the granting of financial credit, may almost unconsciously pervade the life of a community and be just as critical as any " " controversy over urban redevelopment or welfare policy", Frey, Ibid, pl091.

89 W A Gamson, The Strategy of Social Protest, Irwin-Dorsey, International, London, 1975, has for example, examined the experience of a represented collection of 53 voluntary groups in America, between 1800 and 1945, who have challenged the status quo.

90 For an account of some of the difficulties associated with this argument see : J Lively 'Pluralism and Consensus', in P Birnbaum, J Lively, and G Parry (eds), Democracy, Consensus and Social Contract, Sage Modern Politics Series, Vol.2, London, 1978, pp 187-202, who maintains that pluralism has to resort to consensus in order to maintain coherence. Disintegrating tendencies are still apparent within pluralism, both intellectually and empirically, history has provided no guarantee of stability. For an account of the theoretical ambivalence in pluralist thought see, J W Chapman, Ibid. For differing viewpoints upon the question of pluralism and consensus see, A Fox Ibid pp 264-273, and the critiques presented by H A Clegg, 'Pluralism in Industrial Relations', British Journal of Industrial Relations, Vol.13, 1975, pp 309-316, and Hyman, op cit.

- 91 See for example, S Lukes Power : A radical view, Macmillan, London and Basingstoke, 1974, p21: Martin, op cit, pp 44-45.
- 92 P Bachrach and M S Baratz, 'Two faces of power', American Political Science Review, Vol.56, p952.
- 93 E E Schattsneider, The Semi-Sovereign People, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York, 1960, "All forms of political organisation have a bias in favour of the exploitation of some kinds of conflict and the suppression of others because organisation is the mobilisation of bias. Some issues are organised into politics while others are organised out", p71.
- 94 Op cit, p185.
- 95 P Bachrach and M S Baratz, Power and Poverty : Theory and Practice, Oxford U P., New York, 1970, p43.
- 96 Op cit, p36.
- 97 M A Crensen, The un-Politics of Air Pollution, John Hopkins Press, London, 1979.
- 98 C J Friedrich, Men and His Government, McGraw-Hill, New York, 1963, pp 199-215.
- 99 He maintains that ruling classes maintain a unity as a result of organic relations established between the state and civil society within which subaltan groups are able to acquire a degree of autonomy in order to press for limited claims within the established framework. A Gramsci, Selections from Prison Notebooks, Q Hoare and G N Smith, Ed and trans, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1971, p52-53. For pluralist objections to objective interests as 'real' interests see N W Palsby, Community Power

and Political Theory, Yale U P., New Haven and London, 1963, pp 20-23. For a methodological objection to the measurement of objective interests, see Walfinger op cit.

100 There is some ambiguity within Bachrach and Baratz definition of a non-issue however they do claim it in large part to be ".... a decision that results in suppression or thwarting of a latent or manifest challenge to the values and interests of the decision-maker". op cit 1970, p44 : and, "an attempt to prevent an issue from reaching the decision-making state". Ibid, p57.

101 S Lukes, 1974, op cit, p41.

102 He distinguishes between power and structure. "where structural determinism ends and power begins". S Lukes, 'Power and structure', in, Lukes, Essays in Social Theory, Macmillan, London, 1977, p18.

103 Op Cit, p164.

104 The evidence of social mobility, for example, suggests that inter class movement is not very great, in industrialised nations. For international evidence see, S M Miller, 'Comparative Social Mobility', Current Sociology, Vol.9, No.1, 1960, Table IVA. Though real wages of social classes may increase over time, the proportion of class income as a share of national income tends not to. M Kidron, Western Capitalism Since the War, Pelican Books, Middlesex, 1970, p12.

For a critique of pluralist concept of power, based along these lines of argument see, D McEachem,

A Class against Itself : Power in the Nationalisation
of the British Steel Industry, Cambridge U P.,
1980, p16-18.

105 Ibid, p18.

106 "History makes itself in such a way that the final result
always arises from conflicts between many individual
wills, of which each again has been made what it
is by a host of particular conditions of life.
Thus there are innumerable intersecting forces,
an infinite parallelogram of forces which give
rise to one resultant - the historical event.
This again may itself be viewed as the product of
a power which, taken as a whole, works unconsciously
and without volition. For what each individual
wills is obstructed by everyone else, and what
emerges is something that no one willed. This
past history proceeds in the manner of a natural
process and is also essentially subject to the
same laws of movement". F Engels, letter to E Blech,
dated 21 September 1890, in Marx-Engels, Selected
Works, Vol.11 Progress Publishers, 1969, p488-90.

107 R Bendix, Work and Authority in Industry, Wiley, New York,
1956, p13.

108 Op cit, p171.

109 Ibid, p216-217, p317-318.

110 Ibid, p136FF

111 J Westergaard and H Resler, Class in a Capitalist Society,
Heinemann, London, 1975.

112 Ibid, p252

113 Ibid, p251

- 114 R Miliband, The State in Capitalist Society, Weidenfeld and
Nicholson, London, 1969.
- 115 Op cit, p246.
- 116 Ibid, p248.
- 117 Ibid
- 118 Op cit, p23
- 119 Ibid, p75
- 120 Ibid, p265
- 121 Ibid, p39
- 122 Ibid, p44
- 123 Ibid, p47-48
- 124 Ibid. Also J H Westergaard, 'Sociology : the myth of
Classlessness', in R Blackburn (ed), Ideology in
Social Science, Fontana, London, 1972, p138.
See also, P A Baran and P M Sweezy, Monopoly
Capital, Harmsworth, London, 1968, p49 : R E
Pahl and J Winkler, 'The Economic Elite : theory
and practice', in P Stenworth and A C Giddens, (eds),
Elites and Power in British Society, Cambridge
U P., 1974, p18.
- 125 Westergaard and Resler, op cit, p147, p246. Miliband op
cit, pp 174-175.
- 126 See for example, N Poulantzas, 'The Problem of the Capitalist
State', in R Blackburn (ed), op cit pp 238-244.
- 127 Ibid. And also N Poulantzas, Classes in Contemporary
Capitalism, Verso edition, NLB, Second impression,
1979, London, p177-179.
- 128 Ibid.
- 129 N Poulantzas, Political Power and Social Classes, trans.(ed)
T O'Hagan, NLB and Sheed and Ward, 1973, p104.

- 130 Ibid, p63.
- 131 For an important critique of these points, and of Poulantzas
in general see, S Clarke, 'Marxism, Sociology and
Poulantzas Theory of the State', in Capital and
Class, No.2, Summer 1977, pp 1-32.
- 132 Poulantzas, 1979, op cit, p175-180.
- 133 Poulantzas, 1973, op cit, p17.
- 134 Op cit, 1979, p177-179.
- 135 Poulantzas, op cit, 1972, p243-244.
- 136 Ibid, p244.
- 137 For criticisms of this view see, S Lukes, op cit, 1977,
p17, S Clarke, op cit, 1977, p24.
- 138 Lukes, Ibid, p29.
- 139 R Miliband, 'The Capitalist State, New Left Review, 59,
1970, p57.
- 140 This point made by Lukes, op cit, 1977, p17.
- 141 K Renner, The Institutions of Private Law and their Social
Function, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1949, Trans
of 1928 revised edition, p142-3.
- 142 Ibid, p198.
- 143 C Bettelheim, Economic Calculation and Forms of Property,
Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976, London, p134-5.
Poulantzas op cit, 1979, p18-19.
For a critical summary of legal, social and central
relations see, J Scott, Corporations classes and
Capitalism, Hutchinson, London, 1979, pp 30-38.
- 144 G Carchedi, On the Economic Identification of Social Classes,
Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1977, also,
'On the Economic Identification of the new Middle
Class', Economy and Society, Vol.4, No.1, 1975.

- 145 Op cit, 1977, p85.
- 146 Ibid. This approach previously taken by R Blackburn,
 'The New Capitalism', in R Blackburn, op cit,
 pp 164-86. Carchedi, maintains that Blackburn
 fails to recognise that the new middle class can
 perform both the function of the collective
 worker, and that of the global function of Capital.
 Ibid, pl13N.
- 147 Ibid. pl14N.
- 148 Ibid. pl67.
- 149 Ibid, pl67.
- 150 Ibid. pl67-168
- 151 Ibid, pl68
- 152 J Rasmus, 'Why Management is pushing "Job Enrichment",'
 International Socialist Review, December 1974,
 quoted in Ibid, pl68.
- 153 Ibid, pl69.
- 154 Ibid, pl70.
- 155 Ibid, pl46-7
- 156 Ibid, pl46-149.
- 157 A Giddens, for example, in a criticism of Bachrach and
 Baratz, argues, "Non-decision-making is still
 basically regarded as a property of agents, rather
 than of social institutions". Central Problems
 in Social Theory, Macmillan, London, 1979, p89.
 This point could also be applied to Crenson, and
 Lukes.
- 158 Allen, op cit, p223
- 159 Giddens, op cit, pp 88-92. A Giddens 'Agency, institutions,
 and time - space analysis', in, K Knorr-Cetina and

A V Cicourel, Advances in Social Theory and Methodology,
Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1981, pp 161-175.

160 Ibid.

161 J H Goldthorpe, D Lockwood, 'Affluence and the British Class
Structure', Sociological Review, Vol.11, No.2, 1963,
suggests that "status distinctions and status
segregation are generally more explicit and more
institutionalised, within industry than most other
areas of social life.

162 D Lockwood, The Black coated worker : a study in class
Consciousness, Allen and Unwin, London, 1958,
found that major changes in market, status, or work
situations possessed profound implications for the
development of trade unionism and class consciousness.

163 "The worker seels his work, but retains capital in himself".

T Marshall, Principles.

D Brian Davis. The Problem of slavery in the age of
Revolution, 1770-1823, Carnell U P., 1975, concludes
that, "...slavery has always embodied a fundamental
contradiction arising from the ultimately impossible
attempt to define and treat men as objects.
Historically the contradiction has generated
conflict, fear, and accommodation, but from arliquity
it has also become interwoven with religious and
philosophical rationalisations for authority and
subordination".

Of wage labour, Marx claims, "What the worker
exchanges with capital is his labour itself (the
capacity of disposing over it. What he obtains as
price is the value of this divestive. He exchanges

value - positing activity for a pre-determined value, regardless of the result of his activity".

K Marx, Grundrisse : Foundations of the critique of Political Economy, Trans. M Nicelaus, Harmsworth, Middlesex, 1973, pp 322-323.

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- 166 Ibid.
- 167 Ibid, p251.
- 168 A Flanders, A leading advocate of pluralism in industrial
relations pluralism, maintains, 'Collective
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of Industrial Relations, Vol.6, No.1, 1968, p30-31
"There should be no need today to labour the point
that the range of interests which employees may
seek to advance or to protect through collective
bargaining extends beyond their interests as
market bargainers..... Non-material interests in
order and equity, in security and status, and
generally diminishing a degrading dependence on
market forces and arbitrary treatment, are satisfied
by regulation".
- 169 Ibid. Flanders defines 'Job regulation as "...to cover both
the making and administration of any rules which
serve directly or indirectly to regulate employment
relationships".

Flanders, does however also provide a narrower definition with a more explicit view of what constitutes an employment relationship. "One way of identifying these relationships is to place them in a legal setting. They are all either expressed in or arise out of contracts of employment (or service), which represents, in common speech jobs. The study of industrial relations may therefore be defined as the study of the institution of job regulation".

A Flanders, Industrial Relations : What is wrong with the System? An Essay on its theory and future, Faber and Faber, London, 1965, p10.

Clegg, for example, asks what is it that professors of industrial relations are employed to investigate and teach? He then goes on to say, "The answer which is now generally given is that they deal with the rules which govern employment. Sometimes these are described as the rules which regulate jobs". H A Clegg, The System of Industrial Relations in Great Britain. 3rd edition, Blackwell, Oxford, 1976, pl.

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- 174 See for example, Kernhauser, Dubin, Ross, op cit, pp 510-516.
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For a view that the industrial relations perspective
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APPENDIX

30th May, 1953.

The Austin Motor Company, Ltd.,
Longbridge,
Birmingham.

J.T. Bolas,
Secretary,
Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering
Unions,
Birmingham District Committee,
160, Corporation Street,
Birmingham, 4.

Dear Mr. Bolas,

Arising from the Meeting between representatives of the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions and the British Motor Corporation Management at Longbridge on the 26th September, 1956, it was agreed that, pending any negotiations which may take place at national level, the procedure for hourly paid manual workers to be followed in any future redundancy within the B.M.C. should be as follows:-

1. Redundancy within a factory of the British Motor Corporation should be dealt with on a domestic basis in the factory concerned. If the Shop Stewards have evidence that local factory managements are not complying with the terms of the procedure as laid down below, they shall consult the local Trade Union Officials who will be empowered to raise the matter with B.M.C. top Management.
2. In the first instance, the Management of the factory concerned will notify the Senior Shop Stewards, and at the same time advise the local officials of the appropriate Trade Union. Simultaneously the local office of the Ministry of Labour will be advised that redundancy is under consideration and will be informed of the approximate number of employees likely to be involved.
3. The maximum warning possible of redundancy will be given to the Shop Stewards, Trade Union Officials and Ministry of Labour, and it is agreed that in no case shall the period be less than three working weeks from the time consultation is commenced until the employees leave the factory, if they are working that week's notice.
If the employees are given a week's pay in lieu of notice they will leave the factory at the end of two working weeks from the time consultation is commenced.

- (A) The first week will be available for discussions with the Shop Stewards and/or Union Representatives if requested.
At these discussions the Management will explain fully the measures previously taken to avoid redundancy, the reasons why redundancy is now inevitable, the numbers involved, and the methods to be used in determining those redundant. The Management will give most careful consideration to any suggestions the Union Representatives may have to make.
- (B) On the Friday of the first week the employees concerned will be individually warned that on the following Friday they will be receiving one week's notice in termination of employment, or one week's pay in lieu of notice at the appropriate consolidated time rate.
- (C) During the second week, any individual case can, if necessary, be investigated.

4. That the Company could not agree to the Union's proposals on compensation, but indicated that it was their intention to operate the following until such times as a national settlement is reached.
- (a) To employees of three years continuous service, and up to ten years of such service - one further week's pay at appropriate consolidated time rate.
- (b) To employees of ten years' or more continuous service - two further weeks' pay at appropriate consolidated time rate.

Yours faithfully,

Sgd. G. W. HARRIMAN,

DEPUTY CHAIRMAN, BRITISH MOTOR CORPORATION.

=====

THE BRITISH MOTOR CORPORATION JOINT SHOP STEWARDS' COMMITTEE
CONSTITUTION, OBJECTS AND STANDING ORDERS

CONSTITUTION

1. The Committee to be called the British Motor Corporation Joint Shop Stewards' Committee.
2. Representation: Two accredited representative Shop Stewards from each factory within the Nuffield group with an equivalent number from the Austin Works with voting powers.
3. The Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer to be elected annually who shall retire in July of each year. They shall be eligible for re-election. They will attend meetings as ex-officio members, the Chairman to have a casting vote only.
4. A Standing Orders Committee of six to eight members, i.e. two members from each of the principal towns, shall be elected annually.
5. The Secretary shall attend all meetings of the main Committee and the Standing Orders Committee.
6. Any expense incurred by the Standing Orders Committee shall be borne by the central fund.
7. Those factories not participating in the fund raising competitions shall contribute an annual sum of £10 to the central fund.
8. Meetings will be held bi-monthly in Birmingham, Coventry and Oxford in strict rotation, unless otherwise agreed upon.

NOTE: Clause 7 - It was agreed that if a Committee had insufficient funds they could make a donation accordingly.

OBJECTS OF THE COMMITTEE

- A. To promote friendly relations between the Shop Stewards and members of the various Trade Unions operating throughout the Corporation.
- B. To safeguard, maintain and improve the wages and conditions of its members.
- C. To exchange and impart information in furtherance of Clause B.
- D. To maintain and improve, where possible, the Trade Union membership in the various factories.
- E. The functions of the Committee to be strictly non-political and the Committee should not be used for the furtherance of political objects, but confine itself to the domestic interests of its members within the factories represented by the Committee.

Contd.....

STANDING ORDERS

1. Quorum: Twelve members shall constitute a Quorum. If, within half an hour of the time appointed for a meeting to commence, a quorum is not present, the meeting shall be dissolved.
2. An Agenda shall be prepared by the Chairman and Secretary and, time permitting, circulated to all factories prior to the meeting.
3. Items for the Agenda shall take precedence over all other business unless at least two thirds of those present decide otherwise.
4. Items for the Agenda to be submitted to the Secretary in writing prior to the Meeting and placed on the Agenda in sequence as received.
5. All discussions shall conform to the usual rules of debate.
6. No suspension of these Standing Orders shall take place except by a two thirds majority vote of the members present.

COPY

CONFEDERATION OF SHIPBUILDING & ENGINEERING UNIONS

BIRMINGHAM DISTRICT COMMITTEE

AUSTIN MOTOR CO.

Informal Meeting held on 19th January, 1960, to discuss
Dismissal of Shop Stewards

The arrangement which I am about to suggest for your agreement is in no way intended to conflict with the present understanding and agreements between the Employers' Federation and the Confederation of Trade Unions, part of which deals with the General Procedure between Management and Workpeople Representatives.

On a domestic basis however and bearing in mind that we normally warn any employee of objectionable conduct before discharging him, we are prepared to put the following suggestion where a Shop Steward is principally concerned:-

1. He will be warned of his conduct and a communication sent to his Union. The Chief Shop Steward will also be informed.
2. If subsequently there is still cause for complaint he will again be warned and suspended for a short period. The Union will be informed together with the Chief Shop Steward.
3. Further complaints will result in dismissal.

NOTES

- (a) Facilities for domestic discussion with Union representation if required, will be afforded in connection with the foregoing warnings.
- (b) There are obvious exceptions to the above arrangements included in which are the following:
 1. Drunkenness.
 2. Pilfering or theft.
 3. Fighting or offensive behaviour.
 4. Breach of car purchase regulations.

APPENDIX 7
CONFEDERATION OF SHIPBUILDING & ENGINEERING UNIONS
BIRMINGHAM DISTRICT COMMITTEE

DRAFT PROPOSALS FOR WORKS COMMITTEE AT THE AUSTIN MOTOR
COMPANY LIMITED

1. The Annual Meeting of Shop Stewards to be held in January shall elect -
 - (a) Chairman and Secretary who shall be recognised by the Confederation in accordance with the Constitution.
 - (b) Seven delegates to the Works Committee. The Chairman and Secretary shall be included in the seven delegates.
 - (c) A Minute Secretary.
2. The Works Committee shall consist of the elected delegates and the Chief Shop Stewards of the Unions with membership at the Works.

The seven elected representatives shall constitute the Negotiating Committee.

When meeting the Management, the Negotiating Committee shall include the Chief Shop Stewards of the Unions involved in the problem under discussion. Shop Stewards of the areas involved may be co-opted as and when necessary.

3. Procedure:

- (a) A problem raised in accordance with the terms of the National Agreement dealing with the Provisions for the Avoidance of Disputes which is passed to the Shop Steward and not resolved should then be dealt with by the Chief Shop Steward of the Union concerned. The Chief Shop Steward shall inform the Secretary of the Works Committee of the nature of the problem and the steps proposed for dealing with it. The Chief Shop Steward of the Union may request the assistance of the Secretary of the Works Committee in negotiations with the Management.
- (b) If the problem raised affects more than one Union it shall be referred directly to the Secretary of the Works Committee.
- (c) If the Works Committee decides to proceed with any matter placed before them they shall do so according to the established procedure agreement.
- (d) Problems dealt with by the Works Committee which result in subsequent negotiations with the Management at which the full-time Officials of the Union/s are present, the Secretary of the Works Committee shall be invited to attend.
- (e) At a Joint Works Conference involving a number of Unions, the Works Committee shall be in attendance.

4. Meetings:

The Company will grant facilities for a monthly meeting of the Works Committee and a monthly meeting of all Shop Stewards, to be held during working hours.

The Company will have regular monthly meetings with the Works Committee for a mutual exchange of views.

**TEXT BOUND CLOSE TO
THE SPINE IN THE
ORIGINAL THESIS**



BL Cars

Closure of Liverpool No.2 REDUNDANCY PAYMENTS

MONTHLY STAFF- Lump Sum Payment (Weeks of Pay) (Ex gratia payment plus pay in lieu of notice plus payment related to the requirements of the Redundancy Payments Act)

- NOTE:-
1. A weeks pay is to be calculated by dividing annual salary by 52
 2. Pay in lieu of notice is shown as 4 1/2 weeks = 1 month. However calculation of pay is to be as usual (i.e. salary divided by 12).
 3. The weeks representing pay in lieu of notice apply to monthly staff only.
 4. Pay in lieu of notice for Corporate graded staff is to be according to contractual entitlement (i.e. from 3 months to 9 months as appropriate).
 5. For service over 40 years, add 1 week per year of service up to age 62, age 64 remains at 52 weeks.

S E R V I C E

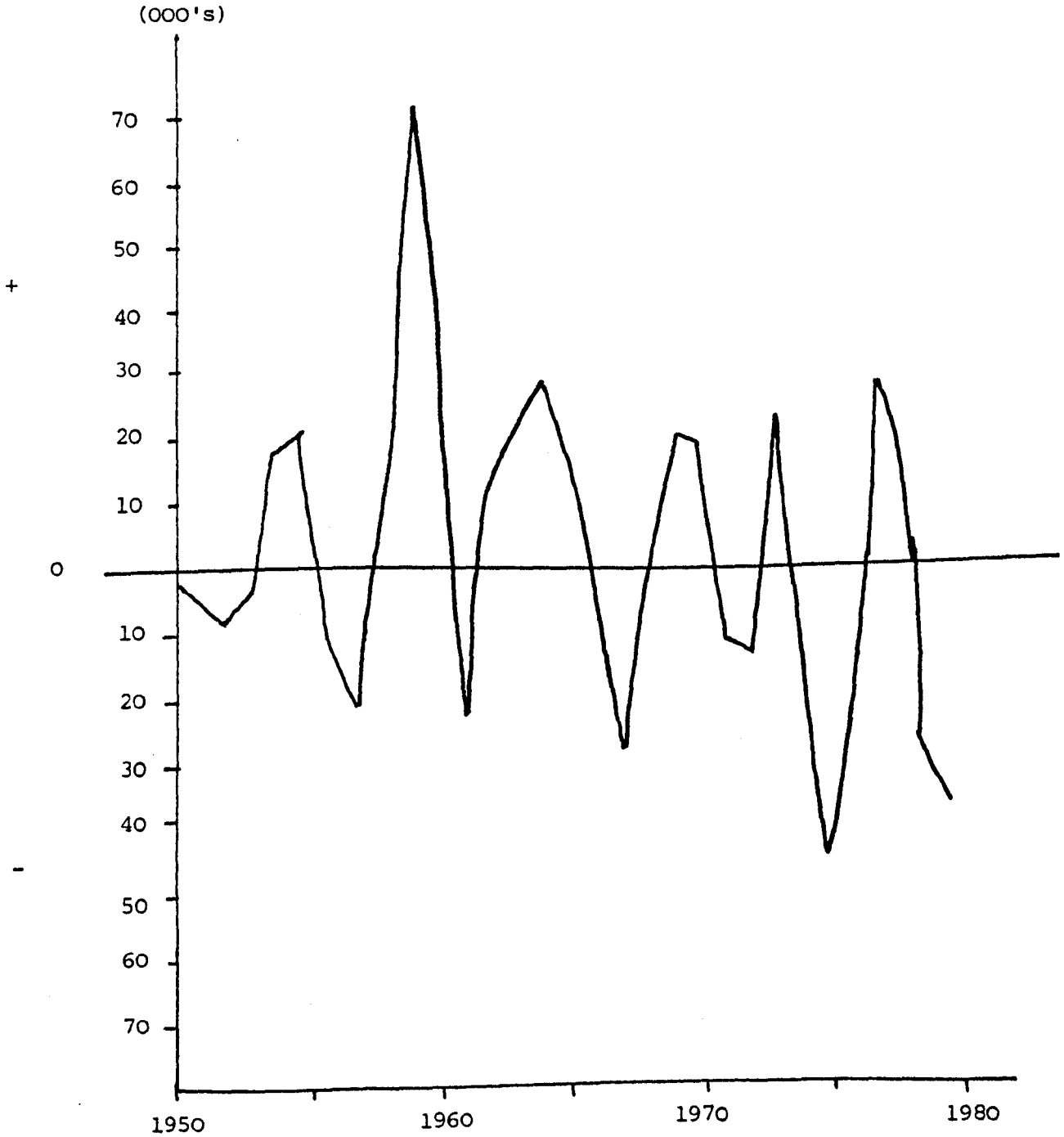
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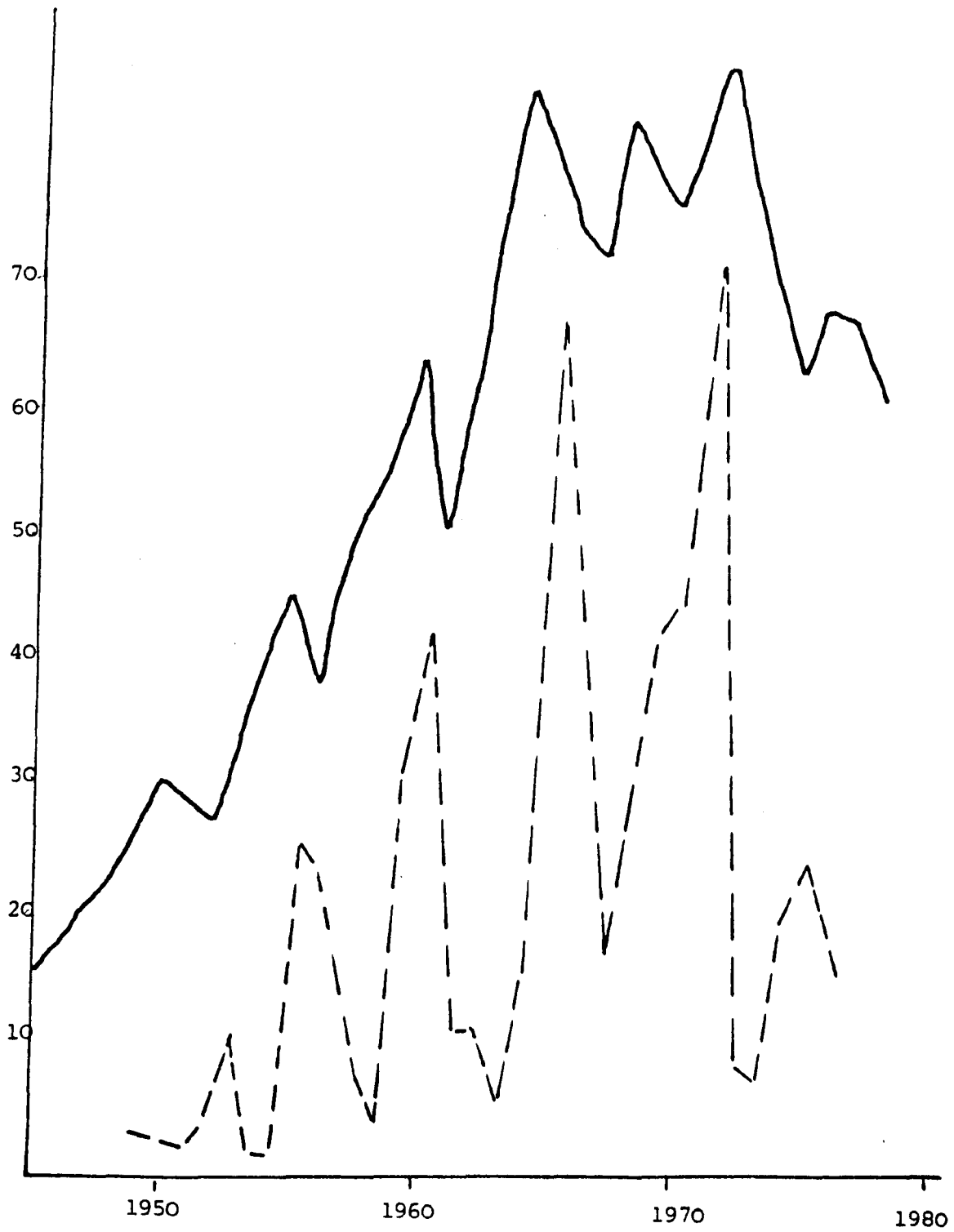
APPENDIX 5

Graph 1 : Annual job loss in UK
Vehicle industry
1950-1980

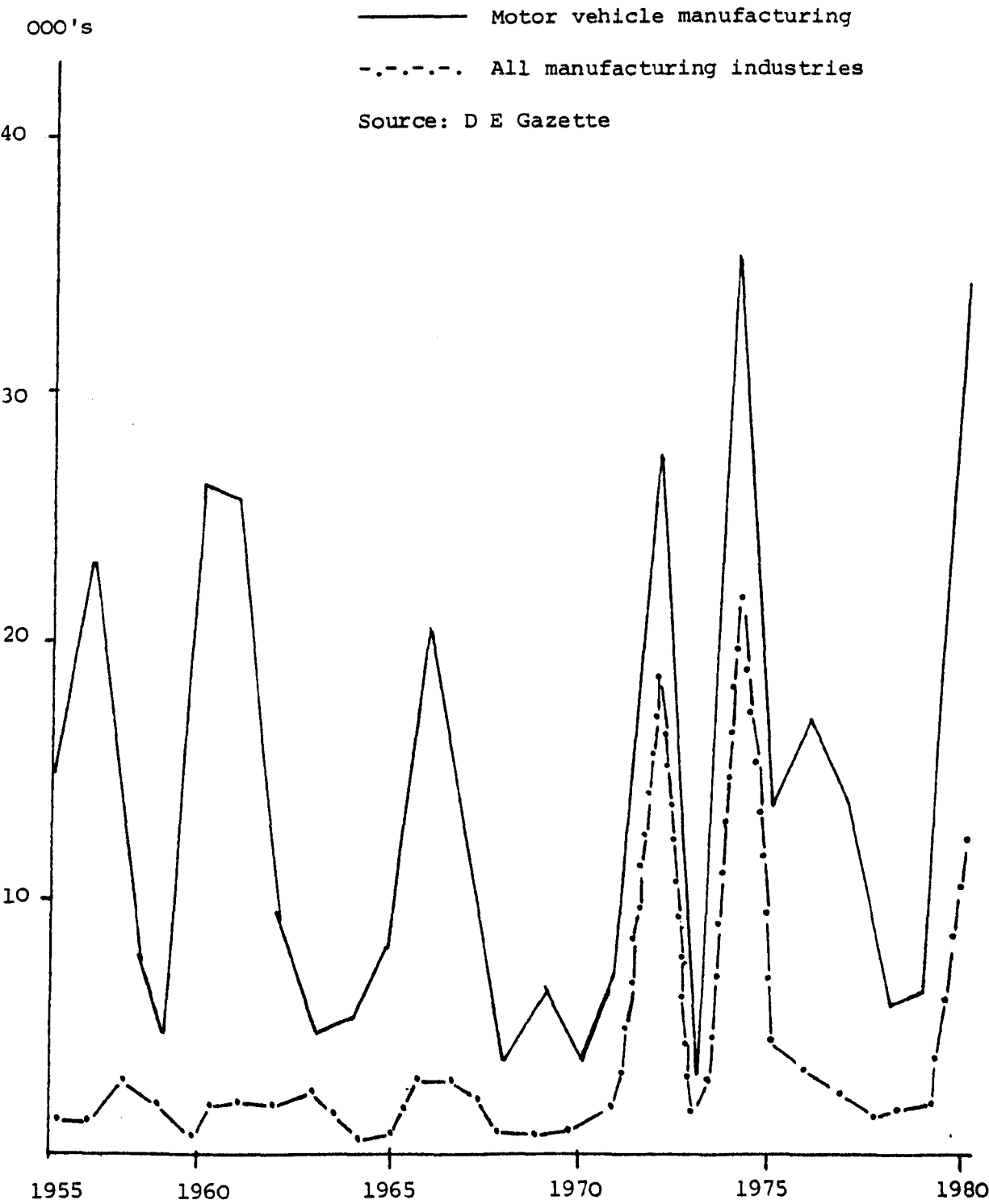
Source: DE.



Graph 2 : Annual production of
cars and highest monthly
registered unemployed
MLH 381

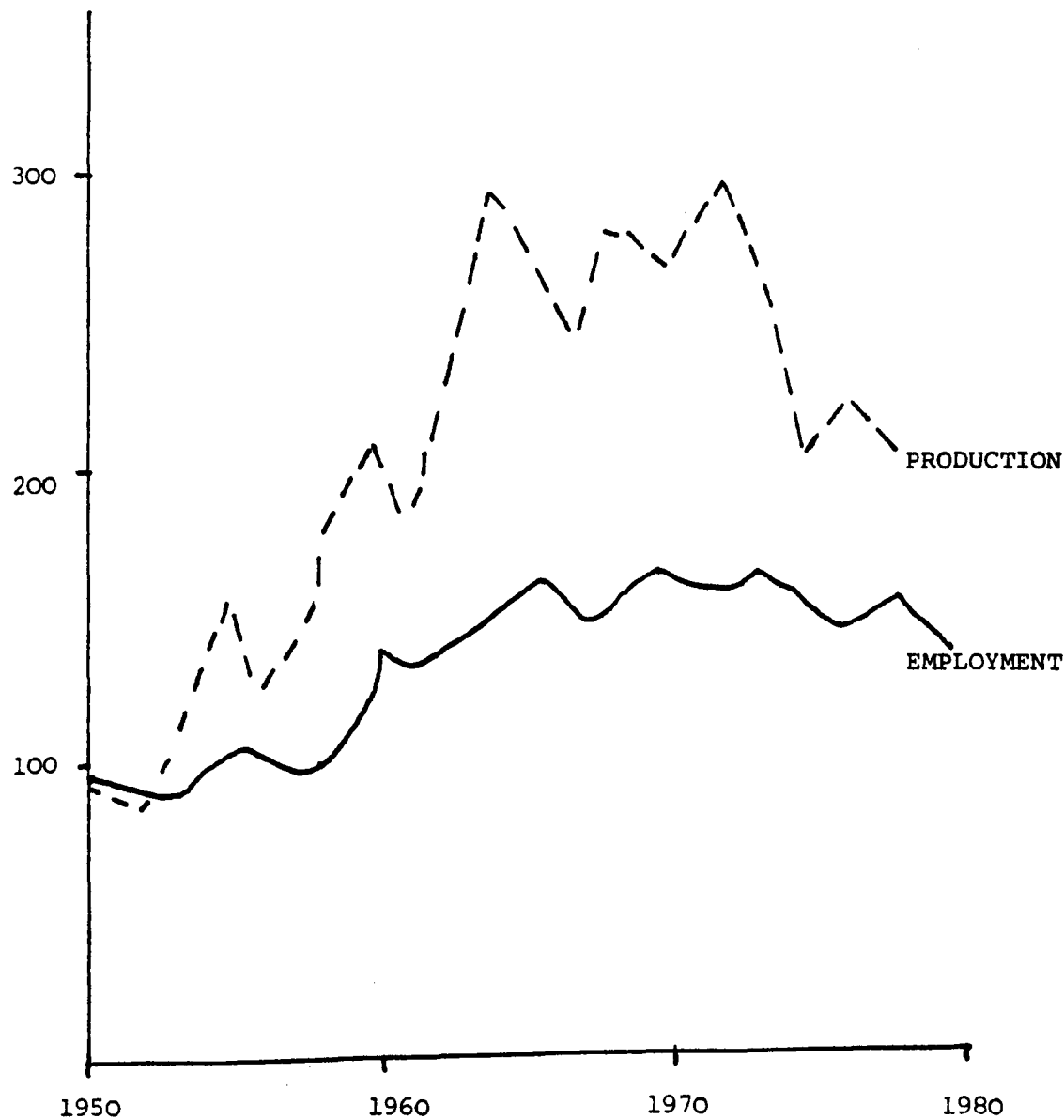


Graph 3 : Highest monthly estimate
of employees on short-time
working



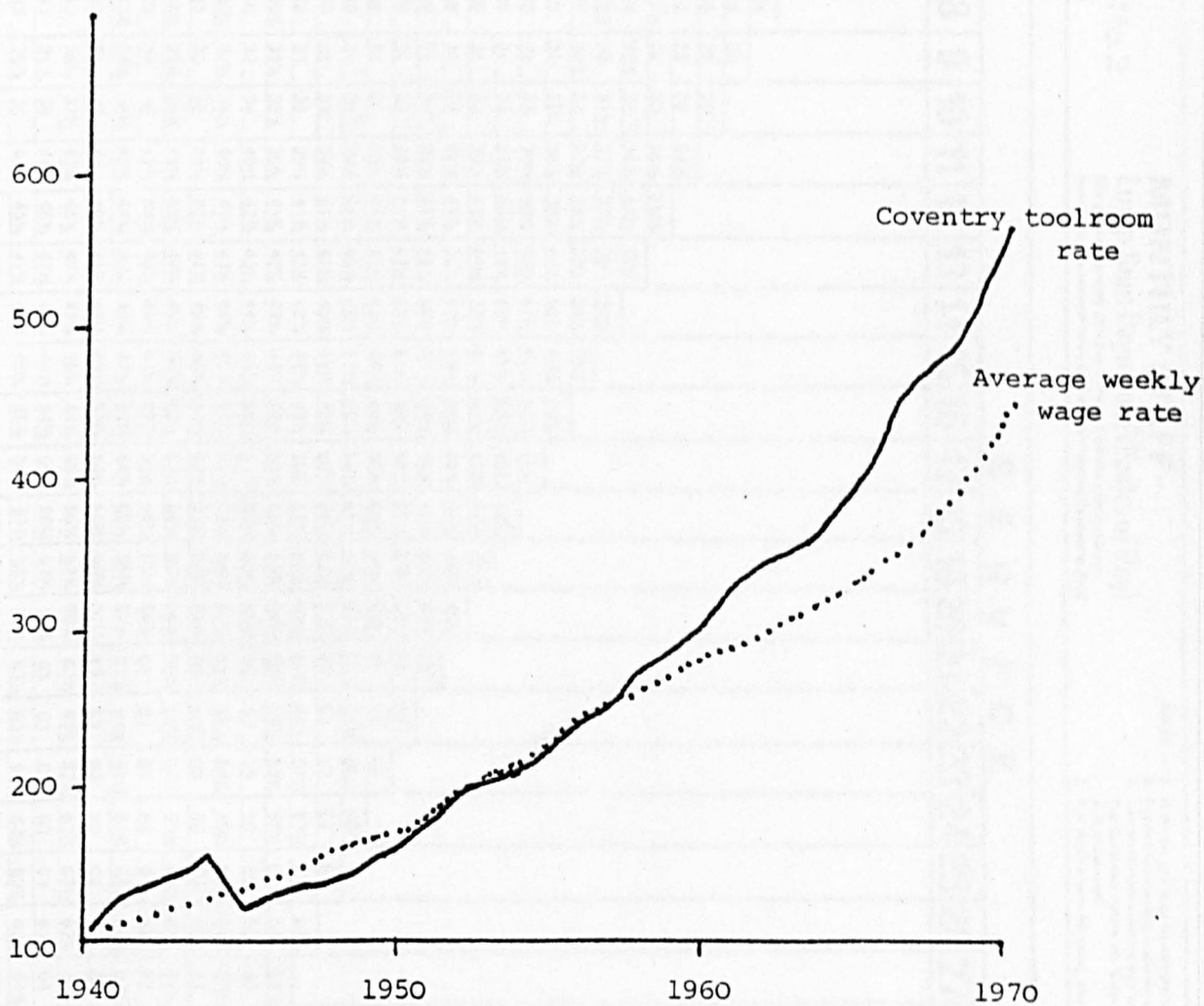
Graph 4 : Motor Industry Index
Employment and Production

Source : D O I, D E.



Graph 5 : Index of average weekly wage
rate in manufacturing with
average wage rate in Coventry
1940-1970 (adult males).

Source: DE, Cov EEA.



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**TEXT BOUND CLOSE TO
THE SPINE IN THE
ORIGINAL THESIS**



BL Cars

Closure of Liverpool No.2
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MONTHLY STAFF -
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NOTE:- 1. A weeks pay is to be calculated by dividing annual salary by 52.
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3. The weeks representing pay in lieu of notice apply to monthly staff only.
Pay in lieu of notice for Corporate graded staff is to be according to contractual entitlement (i.e. from 3 months to 9 months as appropriate).
4. For service over 40 years, add 1 week per year of service up to age 62, age 64 remains at 52 weeks.

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31	13	14	14	14	14	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40																								
32	13	14	14	14	14	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42																							
33	13	14	14	14	14	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44																						
34	13	14	14	14	14	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46																					
35	13	14	14	14	14	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48																				
36	13	14	14	14	14	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50																			
37	13	14	14	14	14	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52																		
38	13	14	14	14	14	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54																	
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45	13	14	14	14	14	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60	61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68										
46	13	14	14	14	14	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60	61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70									
47	13	14	14	14	14	46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60	61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70	71									
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57	13	14	14	14	14	56	57	58	59	60	61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70	71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80	81	82								
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59	13	14	14	14	14	58	59	60	61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70	71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80	81	82	83	84								
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